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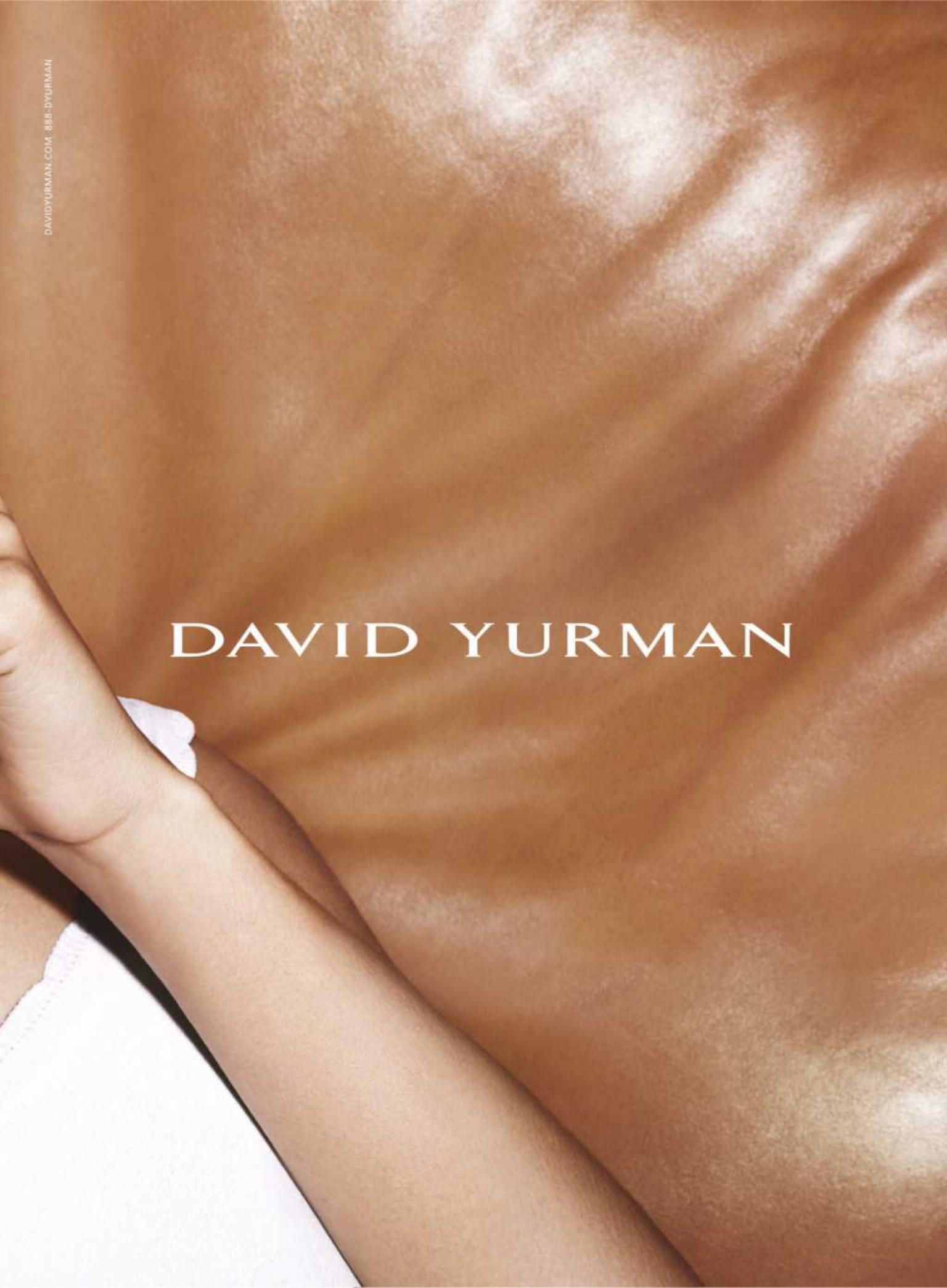
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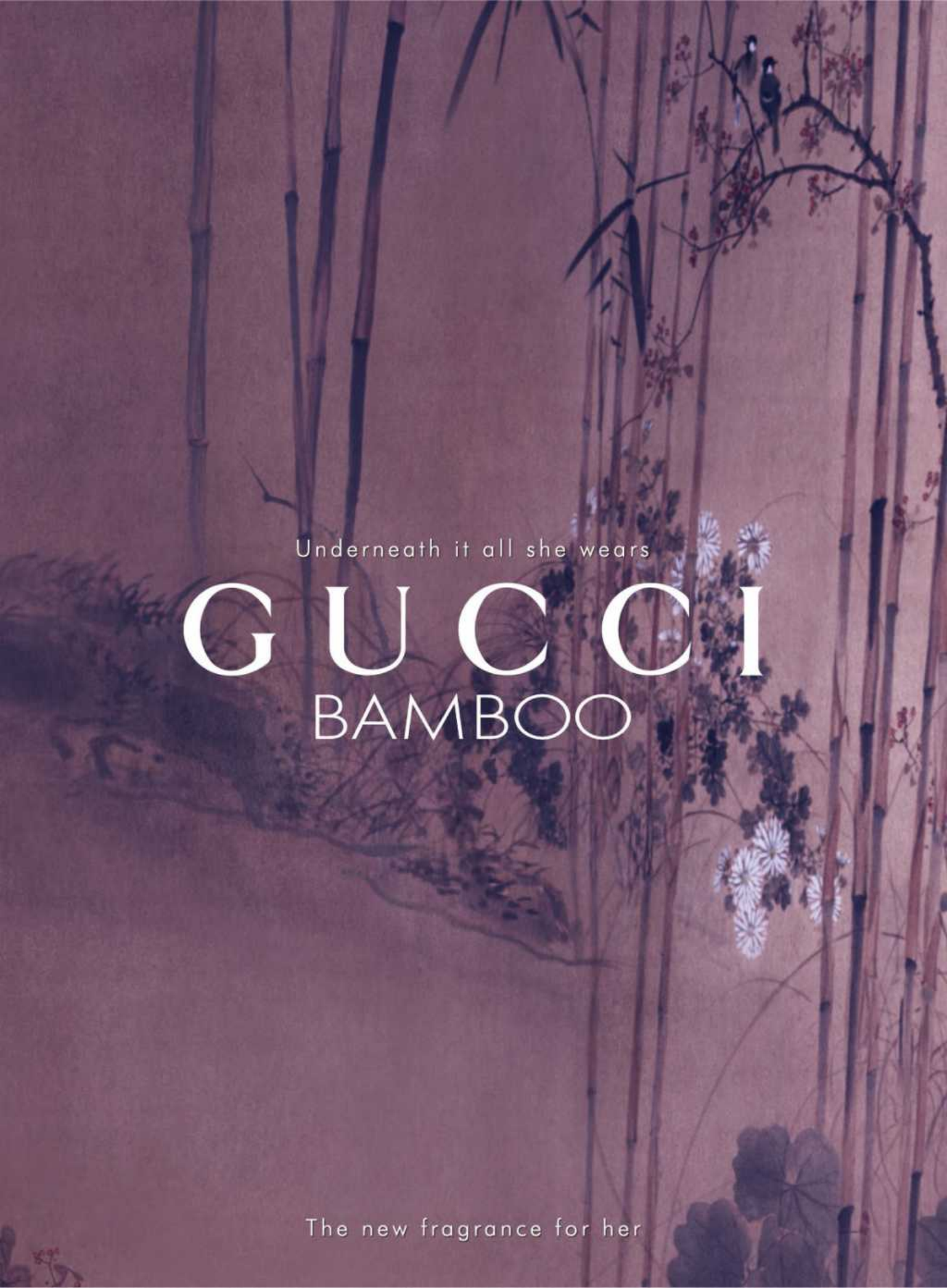
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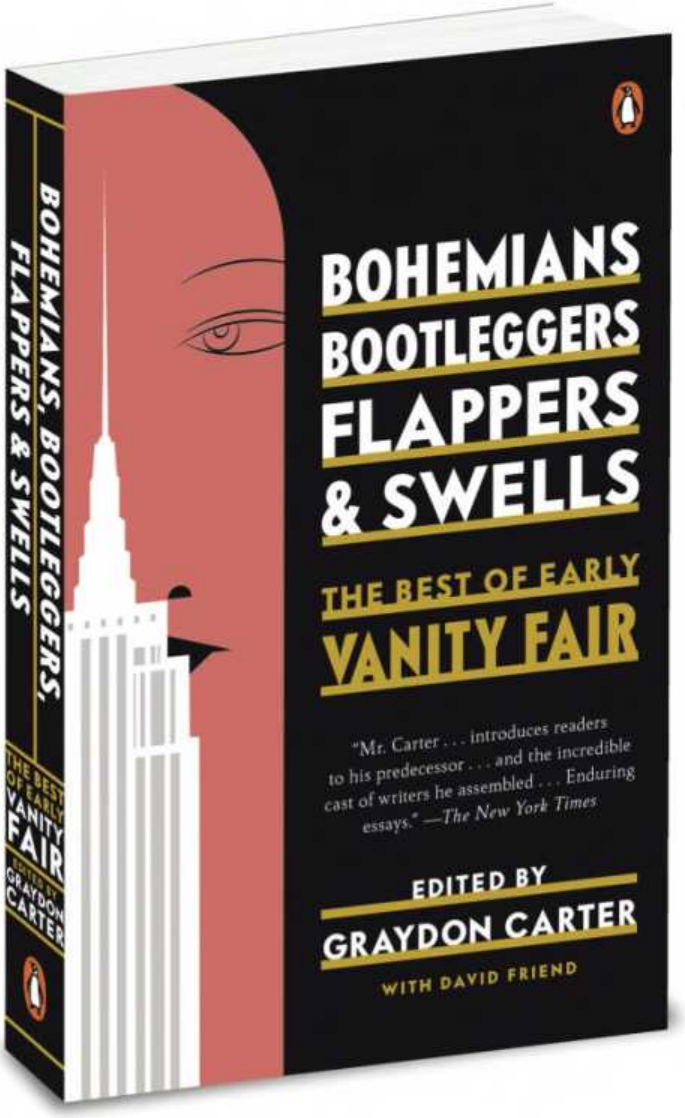
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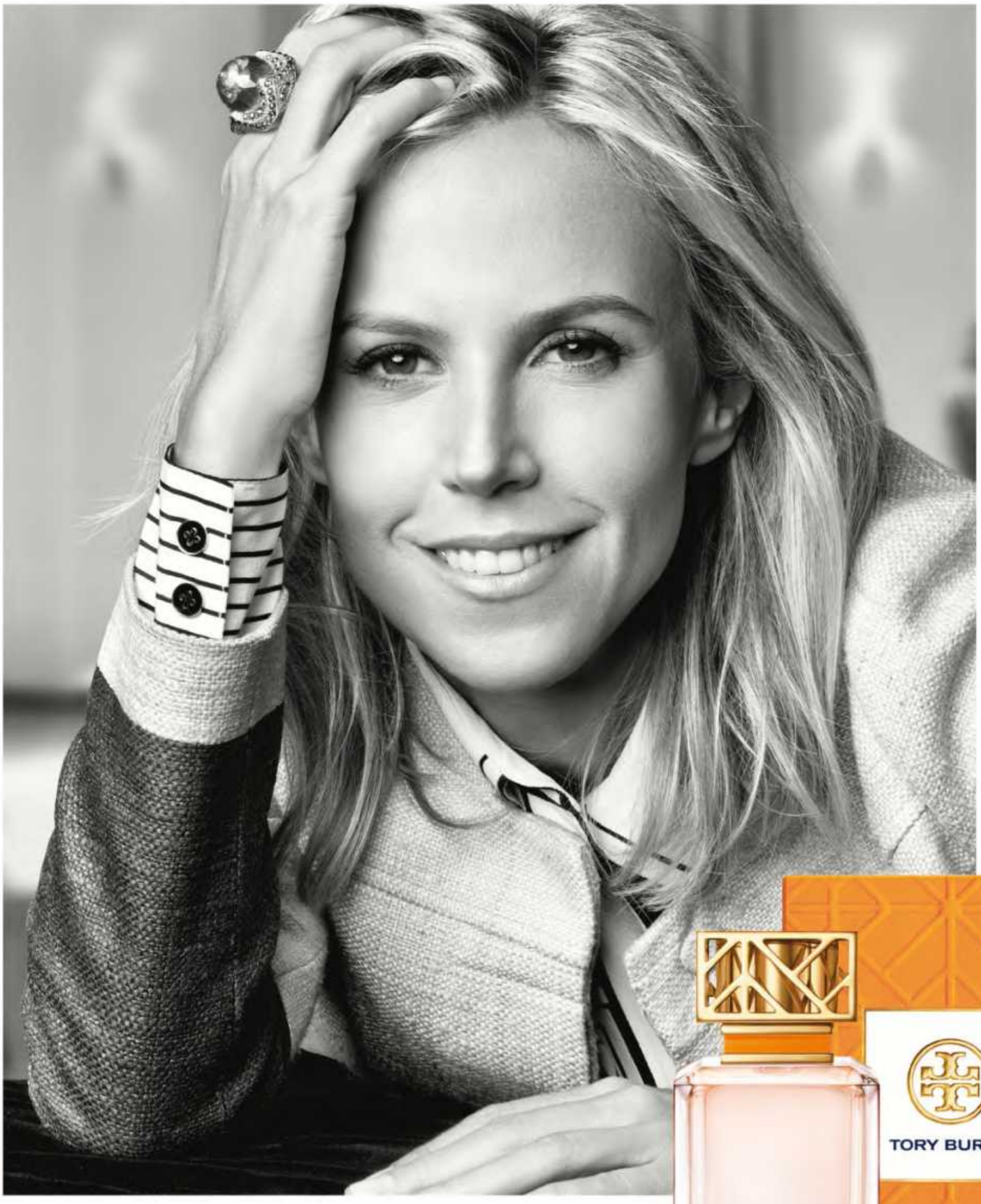
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HUMAN BONDAGE *and* SPIRITS OF FREEDOM



NIGEL PARRY

Like tuberculosis and landlines, slavery seems very much a throwback to another century. But as William Langewiesche reports in his stirring dispatch "Slaves Without Chains," on page 94, slavery can still be found in some form all over the world. Indeed, it is estimated that upwards of 20 million people are currently held in bondage. The problem is global, but Langewiesche focuses his tale on a single heroic figure—a Dominican friar in Brazil named Xavier Plassat—who for 25 years has been fighting slavery in the Amazon, at great risk to himself but with considerable success. Plassat's target isn't sex slavery—a global disgrace all its own. Most slaves are ordinary workers, women and men alike, condemned to lives of punishing labor: in diamond mines in parts of Africa, in the fields and jungles of South America, in the construction sites of Arabia, in the fishing fleets of Asia. As *The New York Times* pointed out recently in a remarkable report on human bondage on the high seas, there is a good chance we have all eaten shrimp caught by slaves.

Plassat is not some pious goody-goody with a death wish and no battle plan. Like any good operative, he drinks and smokes and swears. He's a man of the world whose intelligence networks run deep into the jungle. In the remote Amazon where he lives, he gathers reports, confirms them as best he can, and alerts a special Brazilian police force, the Mobile Group, that then raids the plantations and slave camps that exist all over Amazonia. It is dangerous work, and not just for Plassat (who has been repeatedly threatened). As Langewiesche writes, "At least 12 of his colleagues and more than a thousand associated peasants have been murdered, rarely with legal consequence." One of those colleagues was an American nun, Sister Dorothy Stang, gunned down in 2005. The good news is that some 50,000 men and women have been freed from slavery in Brazil during the past two decades—and these methods could work in other places, if governments cared. The bad news is that the economic forces that drive slavery are relentless: worldwide, the numbers are not going down.

One of the great success stories in world literature is the improbable saga of Gabriel García Márquez and his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* First published in 1967 in Spanish, and in an English translation in 1970, the book has sold 50 million copies in 37 languages. Its author would become the literary superstar known around the world as "Gabo." He would go on to win the Nobel Prize, sit down for conversations with U.S. presidents, and influence literary heavyweights from Salman Rushdie to Junot Díaz.

But as Paul Elie recounts in "50 Years of *Solitude,*" on page 120, before García Márquez was Gabo he was a struggling journalist bouncing with his family from one city to the next—Bogotá, Paris, Rome, London, Havana, New York. Then, in 1965, he was struck by inspiration: the concept for *One Hundred Years of Solitude* suddenly unfolded in his mind, laid out in its entirety. The book would popularize the idea of "magic realism," but before García Márquez had written a word of it he applied a bit of magic realism to his own life—with the help of a pawnshop. Transforming the family's jewelry, appliances, and such into money, he bought himself 18 undistracted months. He settled into his study in a rented house in Mexico City with only his cigarettes and his Olivetti, and at the end, he emerged with a manuscript.

Carmen Balcells, García Márquez's longtime literary agent, told Elie about the first time she met her future client, in 1965. During the day, she said, García Márquez showed Carmen and her husband Mexico City. At night they ate and drank, and ate and drank some more. Eventually, and in jest, García Márquez drew up a contract proclaiming Balcells his agent. The terms: exclusive worldwide representation for the next 120 years. Only 50 years have elapsed, but time is up. Balcells, who died in September at the age of 85, spent her last days meeting with lawyers to prepare her agency for an eventual sale. (As of this writing, the disposition remains uncertain.)

As described by Elie, García Márquez's novel, his priorities, and his way of working represent an antidote to much of what's wrong with the way we live and work. Many a writer would be tempted to rent that house in Mexico City—but now it would probably have to have a decent cell-phone signal and Wi-Fi.

Any day you get to publish an essay by Jan Morris is a good day as far as I'm concerned. Like so many others, I've been inspired, informed, provoked, and astonished by her writing for decades. At age 89, the well-traveled author of such modern classics as *The Great Port, Manhattan '45,* and *Conundrum* is still turning out perfectly wrought sentences from her outpost in North Wales.

Not long ago, she said she wanted to re-explore Venice, a place she first encountered in 1945—as an 18-year-old British serviceman then named James Humphrey Morris—and has returned to again and again. In the city of Tiepolo and Canaletto, of Harry's Bar and, nowadays, outsize cruise ships groaning with thousands of selfie-stick shutterbugs, Morris finds "a living essence of hyperbole, the gaudiest of dreams." In "Magnificent Obsession," on page 76, she folds 70 years of casual visits and full-time residencies into something that is pure Morris—part memoir and part love letter, romantic yet astringent, a backstreet ramble through Venice past and present. The dreamlike city, she writes, remains wildly, vividly afloat, despite predictions of her watery demise. And she asks, "Is not the jangling, money-mad exuberance of today's Venice only an old fervor of La Serenissima brought up to date?"

—GRAYDON CARTER

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ZUCKERBERG UNPLUGGED

Silicon Valley's dreams of virtual reality? Not for everyone. Tech bubbles? Sure to burst. Maybe it's a generational thing

Max Chafkin's article ["It's All in the Eyes," October] states that Mark Zuckerberg and Palmer Luckey dream of Neal Stephenson's "metaverse," "a nearly limitless virtual world [with] billions of plugged-in people. They will exchange ideas, buy and sell goods, such as virtual real estate . . . and have incredibly realistic cybersex." Chafkin's piece, documenting the techno-pagan elite's creation of a virtual-reality headset to take us into the spiritual realm, describes what is to me reminiscent of Timothy Leary's 1960s LSD aspirations.

KENNETH C. MOSIER II
Pensacola, Florida

When driving to my house on a lake, I was taken by the changing leaves in all their color and glory. Earlier I had read an article in *V.F.* on virtual reality, and a line stuck in my mind: "What would be a better entertainment technology than perfect virtual reality?" I thought, Reality!

GARRY KING
La Minerve, Quebec

Mark Zuckerberg "changed the world once," you say as you rank the New Establishment. Well, he didn't change my world. I may still be counted as a Facebook user even though I resigned . . . but to me it's all boring and useless. Three hundred million supposed users of Zuckerberg's social-media apps are wrapped up in the world of ME. They should all be reading Shakespeare instead.

When the tech world's bubble blows out—and it will, soon—it will make the dot-com bust look like a child's bubble. Cellophane Valley is the modern-day Gold Rush of 1849, and we know what happened then.

LAURENCE C. DAY
St. Louis, Missouri

I'm laughing at the write-up of what took place behind the scenes on the Mark Zuckerberg cover shoot. In July you featured Caitlyn: The secrecy! The drama! The costume changes! For Mark, it happened hastily—no makeup, no designer outfits, no staging.

That pretty much sums up the difference between Northern and Southern California!

ANN O'LEARY
Menlo Park, California

POP!

In October's article "Unicorns and Rain Clouds," by Nick Bilton, he describes the tech bubble, 2.0. There is a weak component of his analysis: the involvement of the general population. The inflating of the first tech bubble, in the late 90s, was partly caused by the delusion that everyone was a natural-born stock picker. Likewise, the financial plan that required the selling of one's primary residence every three years for 150 percent of the purchase price greatly influenced the real-estate bubble of the aughts. If there is an impending valuation correction of tech start-ups, I feel the only industries affected will be V.C.'s and the engineers of Silicon Valley.

BRIAN DAVIS
Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania

LEAN IN A LITTLE MORE

I was reading the Top 10 New Establishment entries and was really enjoying the commentary until I flicked to Sheryl Sandberg. Her blurb is half the length of the men's bios. It was about her husband's death. Why not her diverse work history, or her book, or anything as relevant as the men's? My only hope is that you take an equal interest in an individual irrespective of gender.

NICOLE BLAIR
Melbourne, Australia

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More from the V.F. MAILBAG



"**You, sir, are a senior.**" Never mind that this inflammatory epithet was hurled at James Wolcott (by Lorna Kenny, of Charleston, South Carolina–something to do with Wolcott's saying **seniors are receiving "disproportionate benefits" while "hanging around longer just so they can watch Fox News**"). It could have been flung **at any of the seniors on staff.** And it stings.

About that Wolcott piece ("The #ME! Generation," October), Sidney Fussell writes, from New York City, to say that where "the older generation can only see **smartphone addiction and escapism** among Millennials, I see **engagement and the new form of civic responsibility.**"

"Damn, Bruce Feirstein **nailed it,**" Lisa MacFarlane, a "**Gen X**" member from Vancouver, writes. "**I am laugh-crying reading his perfect chart**" ("Generation Gaps," November). "**Artisanal pickles!**" she exclaims. Thank you, Lisa! The Mailbag badly needed a new phrase to drive away the memory of ... **of that other one, about the seniors.**

ILLUSTRATION BY LEILLO


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PAUL ELIE

Half a century after Gabriel García Márquez hunkered down in a quiet part of Mexico City to write *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* Paul Elie revisits the novel's creation in "50 Years of *Solitude,*" on page 120. "It's very powerful to think that 50 years ago, right now, García Márquez was at a desk in a smoke-filled room, following the Buendía family." Elie, who teaches at Georgetown, is the author of *Reinventing Bach* and *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*.



JAMIE MALANOWSKI

From Rachel Dolezal to American Pharoah, the most talked-about personalities of 2015 are all on the guest list when Jamie Malanowski imagines the party of the year in "Last Call, 2015," on page 110. "It would have been fun if the Pope had stuck around long enough to chat up Amy Schumer," notes Malanowski, whose seventh book, *Commander Will Cushing: Daredevil Hero of the Civil War,* is now out in paperback from Norton.



WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

In his 30 years of reporting from around the world, International Correspondent William Langewiesche has met slaves in Mauritania, Algeria, Niger, and Sudan—even in Southern California. But it was to Brazil that he ventured for his account of modern slavery, "Slaves Without Chains," on page 94. "Brazil is a leader because it admits that systemic slavery exists," says Langewiesche. "And it has taken strong action on that basis."



PUNCH HUTTON & CAT BUCKLEY

Twelve years ago, Deputy Editor Punch Hutton dreamed up the first *Vanity Fair* gift guide, with the mandate to "find something extraordinary for everyone." This year's gift guide, beginning on page 43, is *V.F.*'s biggest ever and the product of a year-long operation that saw Hutton and Assistant Editor Cat Buckley (standing) gathering and evaluating thousands of submissions. Hutton, who calls it a "huge team effort," also singled out contributions from Associate Photography Editor Rachel DeLoache Williams and designer Kim Gray.



ERIC KONIGSBERG

For "The Battle of Lyford Cay," on page 104, Eric Konigsberg reports from that famously exclusive Bahamian enclave, where property squabbles between billionaire neighbors Louis Bacon and Peter Nygard have devolved into defamation claims. "These are both people used to having their own way," says Konigsberg. "And not used to sharing space." Konigsberg, a former *New York Times* reporter, has contributed to *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic* and is the author of *Blood Relation*.

HUTTON AND BUCKLEY PHOTOGRAPHED BY BEN PARK. PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIA MALANOWSKI (MALANOWSKI), WAYNE MASER (KONIGSBERG), GARY MCCARTHY (ELIE), GASPER TRINGALE (LANGEWIESCHE)



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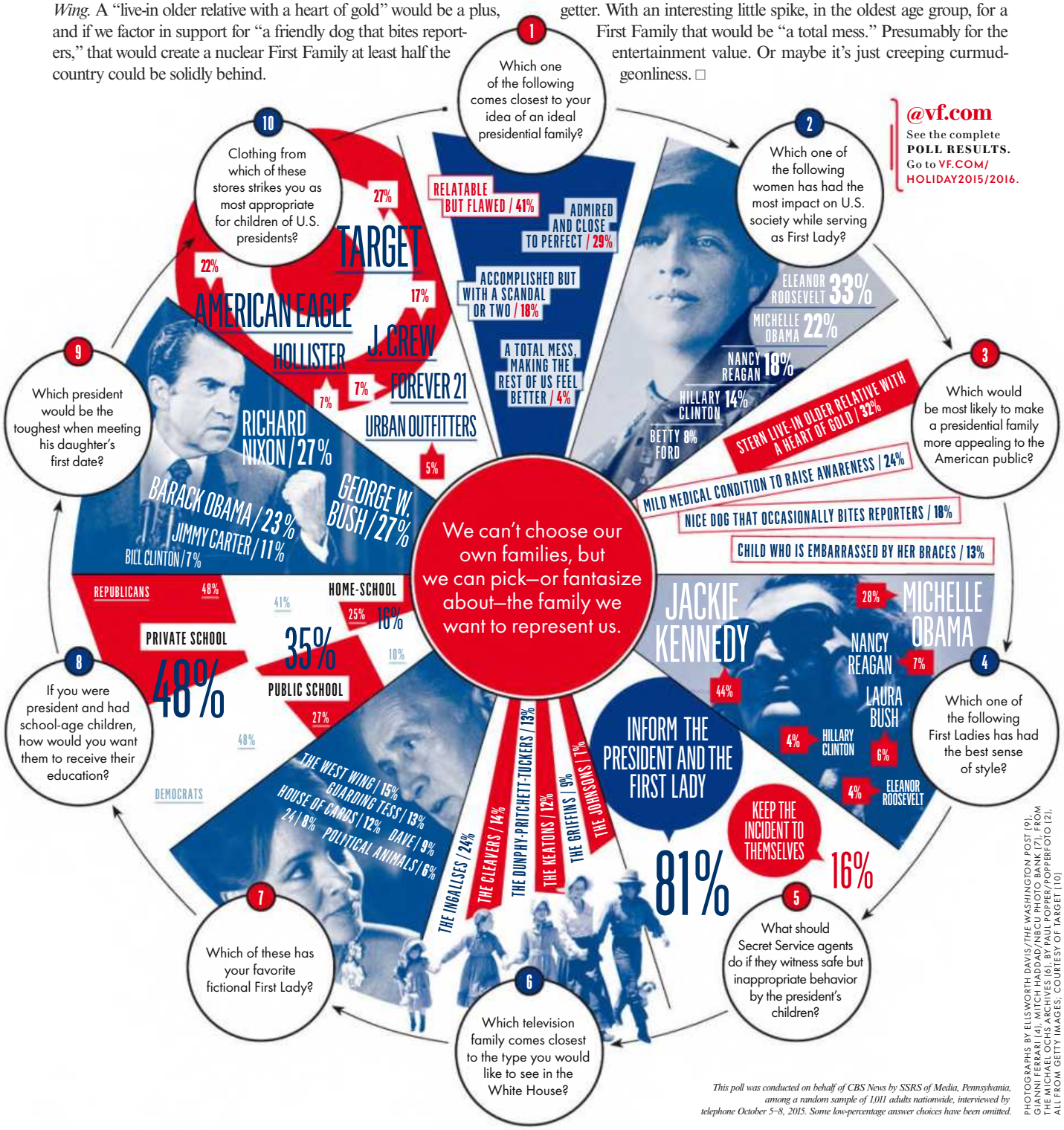
The presidential election is still pretty far off, but the verdict is in on First Families. We Americans know what we want, and what we don't.

We'd like a First Lady to have the style of Jackie Kennedy or Michelle Obama. Oh, and we'd like that stylish First Lady to be Stockard Channing—the one she portrayed in *The West Wing*. A "live-in older relative with a heart of gold" would be a plus, and if we factor in support for "a friendly dog that bites reporters," that would create a nuclear First Family at least half the country could be solidly behind.

And the First Progeny? Send them to private school, we say. And that next generation should be watched over by eagle-eyed Secret Service agents whose loyalty is to the president and First Lady. We feel First Kids' inappropriate behavior should be reported to the parents.

What we don't want? Perfection. "Relatable but flawed"—i.e., the way we might see our own families, just maybe?—was the big vote-getter. With an interesting little spike, in the oldest age group, for a First Family that would be "a total mess." Presumably for the entertainment value. Or maybe it's just creeping curmudgeonliness. □

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See the complete **POLL RESULTS.** Go to VF.COM/HOLIDAY2015/2016.



This poll was conducted on behalf of CBS News by SSRS of Media, Pennsylvania, among a random sample of 1,011 adults nationwide, interviewed by telephone October 5–8, 2015. Some low-percentage answer choices have been omitted.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ELLSWORTH DAVIS/*THE WASHINGTON POST* (9), GIANNI FERRARI (4), MITCH HADDAD/NBCU PHOTO BANK (7), FROM THE MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES (6), BY PAUL POPPER/POPPERFOTO (2); ALL FROM GETTY IMAGES; COURTESY OF TARGET (10)



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and bad cop, there are...
SHADES OF BLUE
SERIES PREMIERE
THURSDAY JAN 7 · 10/9c
NBC
AFTER THE BLACKLIST

WITH FLYING COLORS The best pickup lines for ART BASEL MIAMI. p. 40

Trump Twitter DONALD TRUMP'S LATEST 140-character roundups. p. 40

THIS MONTH

The 56-YEAR-OLD DOLL is ready to break her silence. p. 41

BARBIE'S WORLD "It's about time they gave me a voice and let me speak."



KIRKE WEARS A SWEATER BY FENDI.

LOLA KIRKE

AGE: 25. **PROVENANCE:** New York City. **BOHO CHIC:** Mom, Lorraine, owns the vintage-clothing store Geminola, which provided many a *Sex and the City* outfit, and Dad, Simon, is a rock drummer (Bad Company). Sister Jemima is an actress (*Girls*) and sister Domino is a doula. Kirke is London-born and moved to New York City when she was five. **AN EDUCATION:** The actress studied film and electronic arts—"Bard's way of saying experimental video"—at college and has long been a cinephile. "I began watching Julie Christie films when I was 15 years old. I wanted to be just like her." **AMERICAN GIRL:** Kirke's first starring role, as college freshman Tracy Fishko in last year's Sundance favorite *Mistress America,* was written by indie power couple Noah Baumbach and Greta Gerwig. "Noah and Greta [who also stars] love words." **SOUND OFF:** On December 30, Kirke reprises her role as oboist Hailey Rutledge in Amazon's *Mozart in the Jungle,* which is centered on New York's high-drama classical-music scene. She waxes poetic about executive producers Roman Coppola, Jason Schwartzman, and Paul Weitz: "They have created an excellent group of characters for women who are strong, know their shit, are professional, and are artists." **THE FAST TRACK:** The rising star recently wrapped the thriller *Mena,* starring Tom Cruise, slated for 2017. "In Hollywood it seems like you need a job to get a job. After *Mistress America,* I suddenly was allowed to read for other movies. Since then, it just seems like I get to be in rooms with people that I would never think I'd be around." —KRISTA SMITH

STYLED BY RYAN YOUNG; HAIR PRODUCTS BY JOHN MASTERS ORGANICS; MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY LANCÔME; HAIR BY GAVIN HARWIN; MAKEUP BY TYRON MACHHAUSEN; MANICURE BY ELLE; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

WELCOME, ART-LOVERS!

Ten recommended pickup lines for Art Basel, Miami Beach, December 3–6, 2015

By SCOTT JACOBSON, MIKE SACKS, AND TED TRAVELSTEAD

Illustration by RAMI NIEMI



A TWIT'S TWEETS

A continuing series

As dutifully transcribed by CRAIG BROWN



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · 12m
Santa Claus would never get a job in the private sector, believe me. Works one night a year. Total loser.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · 15m
Three wise men? Come off it. They brought gold, frankincense, myrrh. That's one wise man, two losers.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · 17m
You'd never catch me mistaking a crib for a bed. Baby Jesus weak, ineffective.



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · 18m
Joseph should have booked top suite in advance. What a dummy! #trump2016



Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump · 19m
Do we want our Xmas purchases left in the hands of a red-nosed reindeer? Rudolf a total lightweight.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ERIK TANNER/CONTOUR/GETTY IMAGES


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Eau de Toilette


PRADA

Lift here to experience ▶
PRADA CANDY
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BLOOMINGDALE'S, NORDSTROM, SEPHORA

THE BARBIE MONOLOGUES

A new talking doll will not be silenced

By ANDREW SMITH



It's about time they gave me a voice and let me speak. Fifty-six years of having to play dress-up with four-year-olds. Trust me. I've had it. No offense, sweetie!

No, I really don't want to meet your other, non-talking Barbies. They're plastic, empty-headed bitches, if you ask me. Sorry!

By the way, I'm starving. Look at my waist. It's smaller than Melissa McCarthy's thumb.

Please. Not Ken. He's gay—not that I have any problem with that! But this isn't a Stonewall demonstration, O.K.? Ken can't make toast, much less love to a woman.

Also, listen to me: Please get over the whole beauty-and-outfit thing. This is the real world. Women have changed. You could grow up to be Hillary Clinton or Carly Fiorina or that old lady who is friends with chimpanzees.

Or you could be Megyn Kelly. She's a Barbie with balls.

I know: Let's go out and find some boys.

They're only "icky" because you're four.

By the way, why does your mom yell all the time? Yeesh.

O.K., sweetie. Sure. See you later. Whenever you want to play, just call me. I'll be here.

Frank, is that you? Put me down. Right now. Your daughter will be coming back any minute. Frank?

Frank, we've talked about this. We really shouldn't do this anymore.

I'm a doll, for chrissakes, Frank. But I *can* talk. And I *will* this time!

PHOTOGRAPH BY JB REED/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES


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HOT GIFTS *p. 44* ... HOT GIFTS *p. 46* ... HOT GIFTS *p. 48* ... HOT GIFTS *p. 50* ... HOT GIFTS *p. 53* ... HOLIDAY BEAUTY *p. 58* ...



ART COLLECTION
Union Jack, by Donald Robertson, $4,200 framed. (646-735-5350)

SLOW READER
William-Wayne & Co. turtle magnifier, $40. (212-737-8934)





TAKE A SEAT
Serena & Lily Riviera bench, in navy, $795. (serenaandlily.com)

ENTERTAINING STYLE
Kim Seybert Pom Pom napkins, $64/set of four. (kimseybert.com)



Hot Gifts

PUNCH HUTTON



GREEN GODDESS
Cartier Paris Nouvelle Vague ring, 18-karat rose gold, malachites, fire opals, $36,600. (1-800-CARTIER)



TALE END
Imm Living's Big Top Balloon Dog bookend in red, $50. (shopwaitingon martha.com)

CARD-CARRYING MEMBER
Thom Browne credit-card wallet, $270. (thombrowne.com)

From haute fish houses and foldable kayaks to emoji keyboards and L.E.D. jump ropes, there's something for everyone in our biggest gift guide ever



STRIKE ONE
Aerin Emerald Shagreen match striker, $330. (aerin.com)





STEPPING OUT
Josefinas New Horizon shoes, $365. (josefinas.com)



GALAXY INK
Townsend Star Wars C-3PO fountain pen, $575. (cross.com)



YOURS, TRULY
Edie Parker bespoke clutch in black with gold confetti, $1,795. (edie-parker.com)



LET'S RALLY
Horne RS Barcelona You & Me Ping-Pong table (medium), $4,150. (shophorne.com)



CAMO KIT
Prada pouch, $330. (prada.com)

PHOTOGRAPH BY GORMAN STUDIO (MAGNIFIER); FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

Hot Gifts

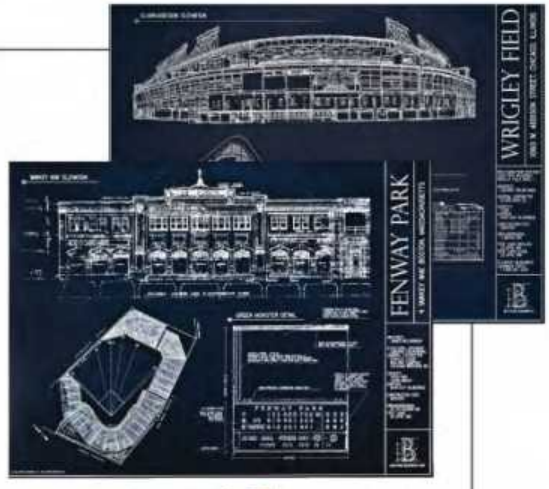
PUNCH HUTTON



GRAPHIC DESIGN
Brik Book, $45. (brikbook.com)



PACK UP
Marc by Marc Jacobs Domo Arigato Packrat, $198. (415-447-9322)



FIELDS OF DREAMS
Ballpark Blueprints' stadium drawings of Fenway Park and Wrigley Field (here), among others, starting at $60. (ballparkblueprints.com)



GOING FOR GOLD
Tiffany & Co. Postage money clip, in 18-karat gold, $3,500. (doverstreetmarket.com)



WATCH THIS
Bertucci A-5P Illuminated field watch, $380. (bertucciwatches.com)

CRUISE CONTROL
Pedego Classic Comfort Cruiser, $2,295. (pedegoelectricbikes.com)





NUTS AND BOLTS
Ted Baker men's bike-repair kit in round tin by Wild & Wolf, $28. (burkedecor.com)



FANCY FEET
Naadam cashmere socks, $85. (naadamcashmere.com)



HEAD FIRST
Loro Piana Alaskan Baby Cashmere Storm System & Fox trapper hat; price upon request. (loropiana.com)

HOME IMPROVEMENT
MoMA Craftworker Cabinet, $130. (momastore.org)



CABIN COZY
Pendleton Crater Lake National Park blanket, full/$219, queen/$249. (pendleton-usa.com)





SLEEPYHEAD
Sleepy Jones silk Henry pajama shirt, $398; silk Marcel tuxedo pajama pants, $348. (sleepyjones.com)

BUSINESS ATTIRE
Berluti Formula 1001 bag in tobacco Venezia leather, $3,900. (212-439-6400)



CINCH IT
Beltology Blue/White Basis, $60. (beltology.com)





PAN HANDLER
Lodge 12-inch cast-iron skillet, $37. (lodgemfg.com)

PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM HOUT (SOCKS); FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS


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Hot Gifts

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TENNIS, ANYONE?
Tory Sport Performance Merino V-neck sweater, $225; pleated jersey skirt, $110; wristbands, $35; canvas tennis tote, $395. (torysport.com)



KEEPING TIME
Michael Kors Dylan watch, $295. (michaelkors.com)



BANGLE BEAUTIES
David Yurman Renaissance aluminum bracelets in navy and metal gray, $250 each. (212-752-4255)

WATER RIDE
Napali foldable kayak by Clear Blue Hawaii, made to order, $9,750. (modaoperandi.com)

SCENTED SHEETS
Frédéric Malle Dans Mon Lit linen spray, $120 (100 ml.). (fredericmalle.com)



WRAP UP
Loro Piana Winter Mountains cashmere blanket; price upon request. (loropiana.com)





SHADY LADY
Oliver Goldsmith Manhattan (1960) sunglasses in dark tortoiseshell, $440. (eyegoodies.com)

SO SNEAKY
Michael Kors Keaton sneakers, $125. (michaelkors.com)





PERFECT PLAID
Burberry classic cashmere scarf in check, $475. (burberry.com)



BUTTON UP
Loro Piana Norquay cashmere cardigan jacket; price upon request. (loropiana.com)



CARDS AND COCKTAILS
Kim Seybert Deck of Cards coaster set, $69.50/set of four. (kimseybert.com)



CLASSIC BEAUTY
Goyard St. Jeanne PM bag, in green, $2,670. (212-813-0005)

SCOOT OVER
GenZe 2.0 electric scooter, $2,999. (genze.com)

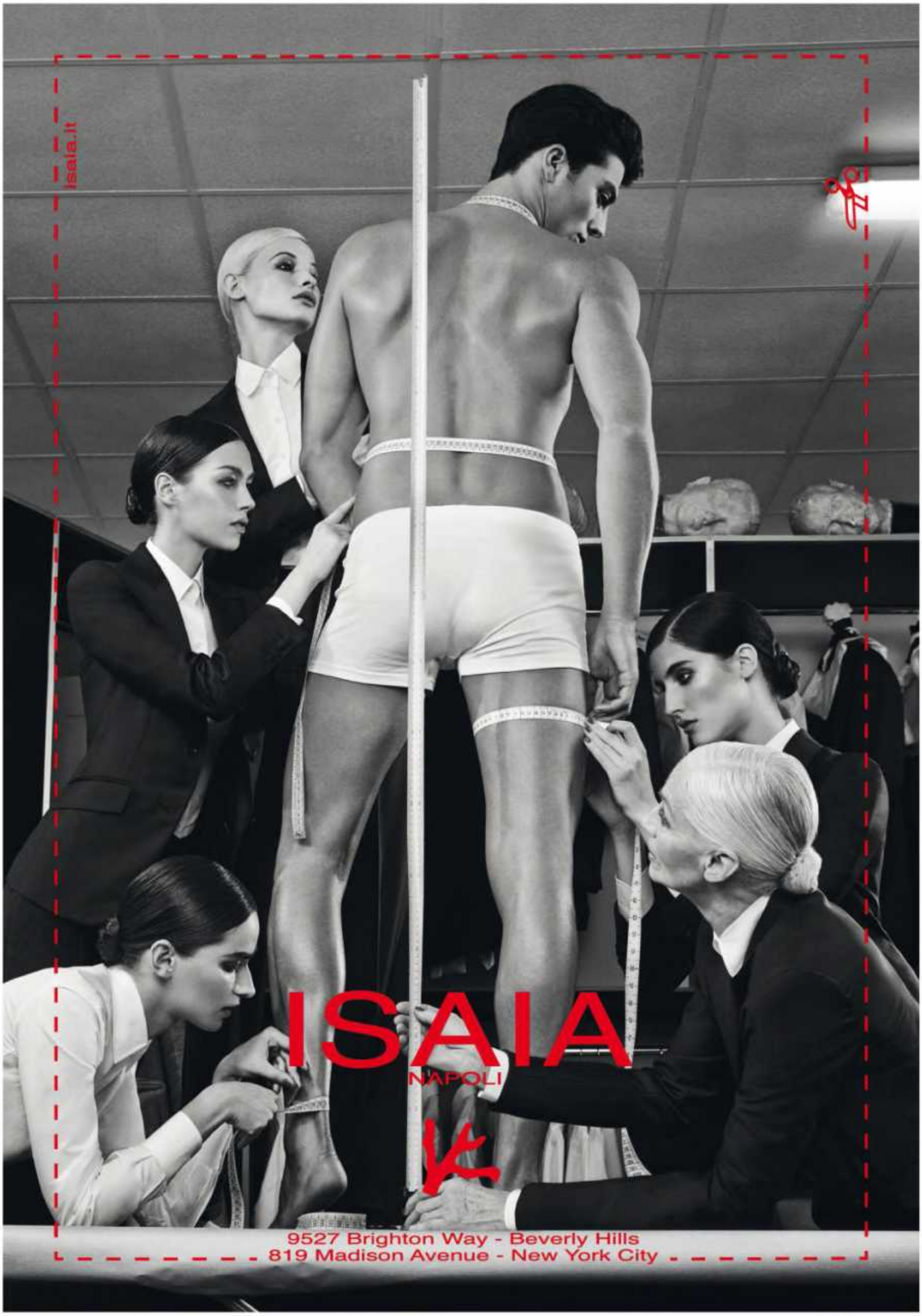


STRAIGHT ARROW
Jennifer Meyer Diamond Arrow studs in white gold, $2,000. (barneys.com)



JAVA JOLT
ROK manual espresso-maker, $199. (crateandbarrel.com)

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Hot Gifts

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BLUE BELL
Chanel J12-G10 Chromatic Blue watch in high-tech titanium-and-ceramic case, $4,850. (800-550-0005)



TYPE FACE
EmojiWorks emoji keyboard, $50. (emojiworks.co)



AN EARFUL
Rebecca de Ravenel Les Bonbons earrings, in blueberry, $275. (rebeccaderavenel.com)



JUMP UP
Smart Rope L.E.D.-embedded jump rope, $90. (tangramfactory.com)



BUDDING SOUNDS
The Dash earphones, $299. (store.bragi.com)



INSTANT GRATIFICATION
Polaroid Snap Instant digital camera, $99. (polaroid.com)



LIGHT BRIGHT
Juniper M lamp, $220. (cooperhewitt.org)

EASY LISTENING
MH40 over ear headphones, $399. (masterdynamic.com)



NAIL WARDROBE
Butter London nail lacquers, the VIP Collection, $150. (butterlondon.com)



TECH WHIZ
Pi-top, $300. (pi-top.com)





ROLL ON BY
Rimowa Topas 26-inch multiwheel, $1,020. (212-758-1060)

H_2O AUDIO
Polk Boom Swimmer Duo waterproof Bluetooth speaker, $60. (target.com)





MONEY MATTERS
Louis Vuitton PF Multiple wallet in damier graphite, $490. (louisvuitton.com)

MIRROR IMAGE
Glam Glass mirror screen protector, $35. (glamscreen.com)





MOBILE KEYS
LG Rolly foldable keyboard, $120. (att.com)

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HOLIDAY SPICE
FLAT WHITE
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Hot Gifts

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SPORTY SPICE
Polo Ralph Lauren Children's cotton-blend-fleece dress, $65. (ralphlauren.com)

HOLIDAY CAPER
Oscar de la Renta Childrenswear holiday plaid cape, $264. (oscardelarenta.com)

CITYSCAPE
Pirasta *The Big Apple Really Big Coloring Poster,* $32. (pirastanyc.com)

VIRTUAL REALITY
Mattel View-Master, $30. (view-master.com)

FISH HOUSE
Umbra FishHotel aquarium, $35. (amazon.com)

MELODY-MAKER
Manufaktur Weiner Wooded Crocodile xylophone, $128. (neimanmarcus.com)

HELLO KITTY
Bonpoint Kitty ballet shoes, $235. (212-879-0900)

GALAXY GEAR
Star Wars/Nixon Landlock backpack, $80. (nixon.com)

SOCK HOP
Cufflinks, Inc., Stormtrooper Dot socks, $25. (cufflinks.com)

SWEET DREAMS
Pemberley Rose La Ballerine Bolster pillow, $69; Rocking Horse Crib fitted sheet in cotton sateen, $50; Le Cavalier Crib fitted sheet in cotton sateen, $50. (pemberleyrose.com)

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES
Custom silhouette letterpress art by Minted, $107 framed. (minted.com)

ART PROJECT
Lost Ocean coloring book, $17. (johannabasford.com)

I, ROBOT
BB-8 by Sphero app-enabled droid, $150. (sphero.com)

BRIGHTEN UP
Stella McCartney Kids Thompson coat, $375. (stellamccartney.com)

FUN FASHION
Fendi Kids sweater, $250–$280 depending on size. (fendi.com)

CAMP OUT
RH Baby & Child distressed-canvas tent, $299. (rhbabyandchild.com)

GUITAR HERO
Schoenhut six-string guitar, $65. (abchome.com)

RIDING HIGH
Electra Kids' Tiger Shark 1 20-inch bike, $330. (electrabike.com)

TREAD LIGHTLY
Freshly Picked Mable the Next Step shoes, $80. (freshlypicked.com)

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FOR KEEPSAKES
CH Carolina Herrera red embossed Matryoshka bag, $830. (212-744-2076)

CONNECT FOUR
Holz Bibabutze XXL wooden Connect game, $275. (BG.com)



HIGH KICKS
Stuart Weitzman Pavenudist shoes in Jet Chevron Swarovski crystal design, $2,895. (310-860-9600)





FUR BALL
Jennifer Behr Shimmer and Fox Pompom beanie in graphite shimmer, $325. (jenniferbehr.com)





PILLOW TALK
One Kings Lane Station Wagon wool pillow, $45; Ski Lift Dogs wool pillow, $39. (onekingslane.com)



PERSONAL PAPER
Holidoodle wrapping paper by Laura Hankins for Minted, $15 for five sheets. (minted.com)



BESPOKE WRAP
Poinsettia wrapping paper by Lena Barakat for Minted, $15 for five sheets. (minted.com)



GET FIT
Jawbone UP4 tracker in silver cross, $200. (jawbone.com)



GARDEN TOOLS
RedHed Tools Garden Tool Master Kit hard case, $349. (redhedtools.com)



PURRFECTION
Charlotte Olympia Feline iPhone 6 case, $325. (charlotteolympia.com)



MAD FOR PLAID
Barneys New York woven silk bow tie in red, black, and white, $95. (barneys.com)

RUFF NIGHT
Le Roar large, 38-inch dog bed in red, $275. (barneys.com)

SEASIDE GLAMOUR
Bask Toweling Blazer, $275; optional monogram, $25. (basknyc.com)





CULT CLASSIC
Adidas Originals sneakers, $130. (mrporter.com)



CANINE COUTURE
Up Country Blue Velvet coat, $44–$49 depending on size. (upcountryinc.com)

HOLE IN ONE
Restoration Hardware Brunswick Ross putting green, $1,995. (RH.com)

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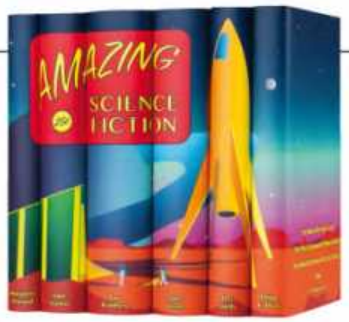


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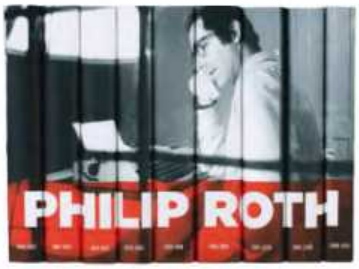
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Hot Type

Robert Harris's *Dictator* (Knopf)—the final volume of his Cicero trilogy—sees Rome toppled by the rapacious ambition of politicians, poisonous self-interests, and foreign wars. Hmmm, how timely . . .



Geoffrey Cowan shoots a hole in the campaign behind rowdy Teddy Roosevelt's rallying cry for political primaries—*Let the People Rule* (Norton). **Ethan Michaeli** headlines the vital role the legendary black newspaper *The Defender* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) plays on the front lines of social justice. With *My Name Is Lucy Barton* (Random House), the miraculous **Elizabeth Strout,** patron saint of the repressed and full of rage, reveals again the ways families mess each other up and forgive.

Finally, memoirists tell the truth and expose their beating black hearts in *Why We Write About Ourselves* (Plume), edited by **Meredith Maran.** —ELISSA SCHAPPELL

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Little is written about the rarefied world of American expats living on the company dime in Asia and even less about the isolated pockets of wives, mothers, and single women living in luxury in this gilded and frangipani-scented bubble. We imagine we know these women, who are distanced from their work, friends, and family, but we don't. **Janice Y. K. Lee** does. Set in Hong Kong, *The Expatriates* (Viking) looks inside the lives of three women—a traumatized Korean-American college grad, a wealthy wife desperate for a baby to salvage her marriage, and a once content wife and mother breaking under an unbearable loss—all in crisis, all needing one another in ways they, and we, can't imagine. —E.S.

IN SHORT

Harvard hockey dude **Bill Keenan** faces off in *Odd Man Rush* (Sports Publishing). **Katherine Zoepf** gives voice to the radical generation of *Excellent Daughters* (Penguin Press) transforming the Arab world. The life of anarchist poet Lola Ridge catches fire in **Terese Svoboda's** *Anything That Burns You* (Schaffner). Intrepid photographer **Guillaume Bonn** travels the *Mosquito Coast* (Hatje Cantz). **Samantha Hunt's** *Mr. Splitfoot* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) is a supernatural road trip. **Eleanor Fitzsimons** puts Oscar *Wilde's Women* (Overlook) at center stage. *V.F.* contributing editor **Mark Bowden** marshals his finest for *The Three Battles of Wanat* (Atlantic Monthly). **Benjamin Black's** Quirke rises in *Even the Dead* (Henry Holt). **Hoda Kotb** points toward *Where We Belong* (Simon & Schuster). **Charles Moore** arrests *Margaret Thatcher* (Knopf) at the height of her power. **Sam Lansky** outs himself as a teenage drug-gobbling sex addict in *The Gilded Razor* (Gallery). **Thomas Fuchs** lights up *Digby's Hollywood Story* (Roundfire). Editors **Annie Liontas** and **Jeff Parker** gift *A Manner of Being: Writers on Their Mentors* (University of Massachusetts). **Herman Wouk** relives a century in *Sailor and Fiddler: Reflections of a 100-Year-Old Author* (Simon & Schuster). —E.S.

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FORNASETTI
Profumi Agatha Large Scented Candle, $520. (barneys.com)

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Black Orchid Eau de Toilette, $98 for 50 ml. (tomford.com)

JIMMY CHOO
Illicit Eau de Parfum, $112 for 100 ml. (nordstrom.com)

BURBERRY
My Burberry Eau de Parfum Festive Edition, $125 for 90 ml. (burberry.com)

TORY BURCH
Parfum, $300 for 15 ml. (toryburch.com)

YVES SAINT LAURENT
Le Vestiaire des Parfums Caban, $250 for 125 ml. (bergdorfgoodman.com)

GUERLAIN
Météorites Perles des Neiges, $80; Guerlain Rouge G Collector in 867 Merveilleux Rose, $55. (saks.com)

MAISON FRANCIS KURKDJIAN PARIS
Mon beau Sapin, $65. (neimanmarcus.com)

VALENTINO
Donna Eau de Parfum, $130 for 100 ml. (nordstrom.com)

MIU MIU
Eau de Parfum, $86 for 50 ml. (neimanmarcus.com)

CHANEL
Le Vernis Nail Colour in Vamp, $27; Chanel Limited Edition Le Top Coat Gold Sparkle Nail Coat in Lamé Rouge Noir, $27. (chanel.com)

MICHAEL KORS
Rose Radiant Gold Eau de Parfum, $80 for 50 ml. (michaelkors.com)

GIORGIO ARMANI
Luxe Is More Limited Edition Holiday Palette, $140. (giorgioarmanibeauty-usa.com)

BULGARI
Le Gemme Maravilla Eau de Parfum, $310 for 100 ml. (bloomingdales.com)

VILHELM PARFUMERIE
Fleur Burlesque Eau de Parfum, $245 for 100 ml. (barneys.com)

CREED
Royal Princess Oud, $385 for 75 ml. (creedboutique.com)

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Indochine, $74. (bellefleurny.com)

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THE NEW ESTABLISHMENT

Tech entrepreneurs, studio heads, titans of industry, politicians, and "unicorns" gathered in San Francisco to take part in *Vanity Fair*'s second annual New Establishment Summit, held at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.


J. J. Abrams


John McEnroe and Jonathan Ive


Bradley Cooper


Walter Isaacson and Graydon Carter


Richard Plepler and Bill Simmons


Elizabeth Holmes


Yuri Milner and David Zaslav


Lena Dunham, Katie Couric, and Annie Leibovitz


Rashida Jones and Maria Shriver

DUNHAM, IGER, ISAACSON, MILNER): HANNAH THOMSON (ALL OTHERS)

FAIRGROUND


Bryan Lourd and Jason Blum


Kevin Systrom and Lena Dunham


Michael Lynton and John Carlin


Mellody Hobson and Lee Daniels


Brad Grey


Julie Wainwright and Bill Gurley


Jon Feltheimer and Brian Grazer


Kara Swisher


Cocktails were served at the Ferry Building.

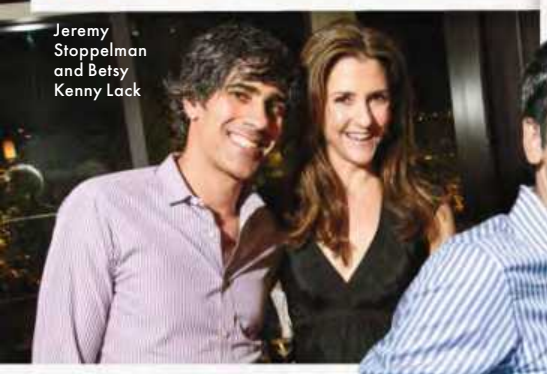
Jane Goodall


Jimmy Iovine and Liberty Ross


David Zaslav, John Sykes, Irving Azoff, and Richard Lovett


Elon Musk


Harvey Weinstein


Jeremy Stoppelman and Betsy Kenny Lack


John Carlin


Sam Altman

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTIN BISHOP (ALTMAN, HOBSON, IOVINE, LYNTON, MUSK, WEINSTEIN); HANNAH THOMSON (ALL OTHERS)


SARAH PAULSON


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KRISTA SMITH AND MATTHEW WEINER

V.F. Social Club Emmys® Edition September 19–20, 2015, in Los Angeles

For the first time ever, *Vanity Fair* hosted V.F. Social Club (#VFSC) to celebrate the Emmys for a select group of influential social and entertainment stars. Held at the creative co-working space WeWork Hollywood, #VFSC featured top-tier television talent in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s editors and contributors, along with panels showcasing YouTube and Instagram stars.

Capped by an Emmys Viewing Party, the exclusive programming made a social splash. Throughout the two-day event, we toasted the 10th anniversary of Victor&Rolf's Flowerbomb fragrance, and guests took photos on the Victor&Rolf Flowerbomb bed of florals. We helped celebrate the launch of Brooks Brothers' new campaign #MyBrooksBrothers and sipped Pellegrino, Absolut Elyx cocktails, and Chloe wines. Among the many highlights:

- *Mad Men* creator and Emmy nominee Matthew Weiner in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s Executive West Coast Editor, Krista Smith.
- Actor, director, and producer Tony Goldwyn in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s Emily Poenisch, presented by Brooks Brothers.
- Actor and Emmy nominee Sarah Paulson in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s Ned Zeman.
- Emmy-nominated comedians Keegan Michael Key and Jordan Peele in conversation with *Vanity Fair*'s Nell Scovell.
- Emmy Awards Prediction Panel with *Vanity Fair*'s Krista Smith and Joanna Robinson, *Time*'s Sam Lansky, and Gold Derby's Tom O'Neil.
- YouTube beauty stars Amanda Steele and Lauren Elizabeth in conversation with Shira Lazar, presented by Victor&Rolf Flowerbomb.
- A panel with Vine stars Aaron Carpenter, Brent Rivera, Christian Collins, Crawford Collins, and Wesley Stromberg, moderated by Ryan Detert of the Influential Network.


CHLOE WINES


TONY GOLDWYN


ABSOLUT ELYX


KEEGAN MICHAEL KEY AND JORDAN PEELE

WATCH VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE EVENT AT **VIDEO.VF.COM/SOCIALCLUB** AND FOLLOW @VFAGENDA.

What You Should Know About

RASHIDA JONES

A PANOPLY OF ECCENTRIC BIOGRAPHICAL DATA RE: **HOLLYWOOD'S WORKAHOLIC DAYDREAMER**

Rashida Jones, the daughter of self-made music magnate Quincy Jones and model turned *The Mod Squad* star Peggy Lipton, has said of her illustrious parents that she is "the genetic expression of all their secret academic dreams." She grew up as an extracurricular-activity-collecting bookworm, graduated from Harvard, and eventually boomeranged back to Hollywood, where she established herself as an actress (*The Office, The Social Network, Parks and Recreation*), screenwriter (*Celeste and Jesse Forever*), producer (*Hot Girls Wanted, A to Z*), and social activist (see her Twitter feed). This January, amid her usual swirl of productivity—including writing *Toy Story 4* with her creative partner, Will McCormack—Jones stars in *Angie Tribeca,* the TBS comedy from Steve and Nancy Carell. Herewith, the inherently cool multi-hyphenate describes some of her quirks, curiosities, and defining characteristics.



WONDER WOMAN Jones, photographed in West Hollywood.

BORN AT the former Cedars of Lebanon hospital, in Los Angeles, Jones arrived into the world in 1976 under "mellow" circumstances stipulated by the Leboyer gentle-birthing method: the lights were dim and the music low.

NAMED FOR jazz-soul singer Jon Lucien's 1973 song "Rashida," she has one full sibling—older sister Kidada, a fashion and jewelry designer who was engaged to Tupac Shakur at the time of his death.

SHE ALSO has five half-siblings sired by her father before and after his marriage to Lipton.

HER EARLIEST memories are associated with music—being in her family's Bel Air front yard as a toddler listening to Patti Austin's "Razzamatazz" (which her dad produced) and the Emotions' "Best of My Love."

ANOTHER FAVORITE childhood memory: helping family friend Michael Jackson take his pet llama and ram for a walk up Hayvenhurst Avenue.

SHE SHARED a Buckley School bus with Kim Kardashian and Paris Hilton.

DESPITE THE oversize Parental Advisory sticker hanging over her bed in high school—procured while interning at Warner Bros. Records—Jones didn't rebel until college: "I kind of lost my mind for a couple years and went to a lot of raves."

SAKE BOMBS were responsible for her first inebriation, as a 17-year-old Harvard freshman. (She majored in religion and philosophy.)

NURTURING THE improbable fantasy that Hollywood socialites are secretly saving the world, Jones is one of the creators of the comic-book series *Frenemy of the State,* about a seemingly vapid red-carpet fixture who is recruited by the C.I.A.

SHE TEXTS most with Kidada and McCormack, but says the messages that delight her most hail from her mom and consist of all-caps, no-punctuation, and random-emoji bursts.

AFTER A very brief courtship, Jones and McCormack realized they were soul mates (just not romantically).

UPON HEARING that they got the *Toy Story 4* job, she didn't celebrate as much as emotionally combust: "I fell into John Lasseter's arms and started crying," she says, referring to the Pixar pioneer.

BUZZ LIGHTYEAR and Woody have infiltrated her subconscious so much that they are essentially "day players in my dreams."

SHE AND McCormack usually write in her house in West Hollywood from about 10 A.M. to 5 P.M.—meeting in the breakfast nook, disbanding to various corners of the house, and reconvening around three, when Jones rings the caffeine bell.

HER DAY is predicated upon when she will have coffee next, so much so that she drifts to sleep fantasizing about the next morning's aroma. (A French-pressed brew, topped with foamed hemp milk, is her go-to coffee fix.)

SHE IS powerless against *Law & Order* reruns: "If there is an episode on, it's getting watched."

SHE DESCRIBES her wardrobe style as "somewhere between uniform, young nun, and Japanese architectural. Pretty simple. I would love to dress like I'm 50 and own an art gallery."

SHE PLAYS piano, co-composed the score for Harvard's Hasty Pudding theatrical performance with her college roommate, contributed vocals to the first two Maroon 5 albums, and occasionally writes music with her nephew, record producer Sunny Levine.

SHE AND Amy Poehler are as close as their characters were on *Parks and Recreation.* In addition to weekly meet-ups, the two have taken girl trips, some with Kathryn Hahn and Aubrey Plaza, to Palm Springs, St. Barth's, and, occasionally, the spa.

JONES AND Poehler do have different vacation styles. "She's all about organization and really likes a detailed itinerary. I probably meander a little bit more."

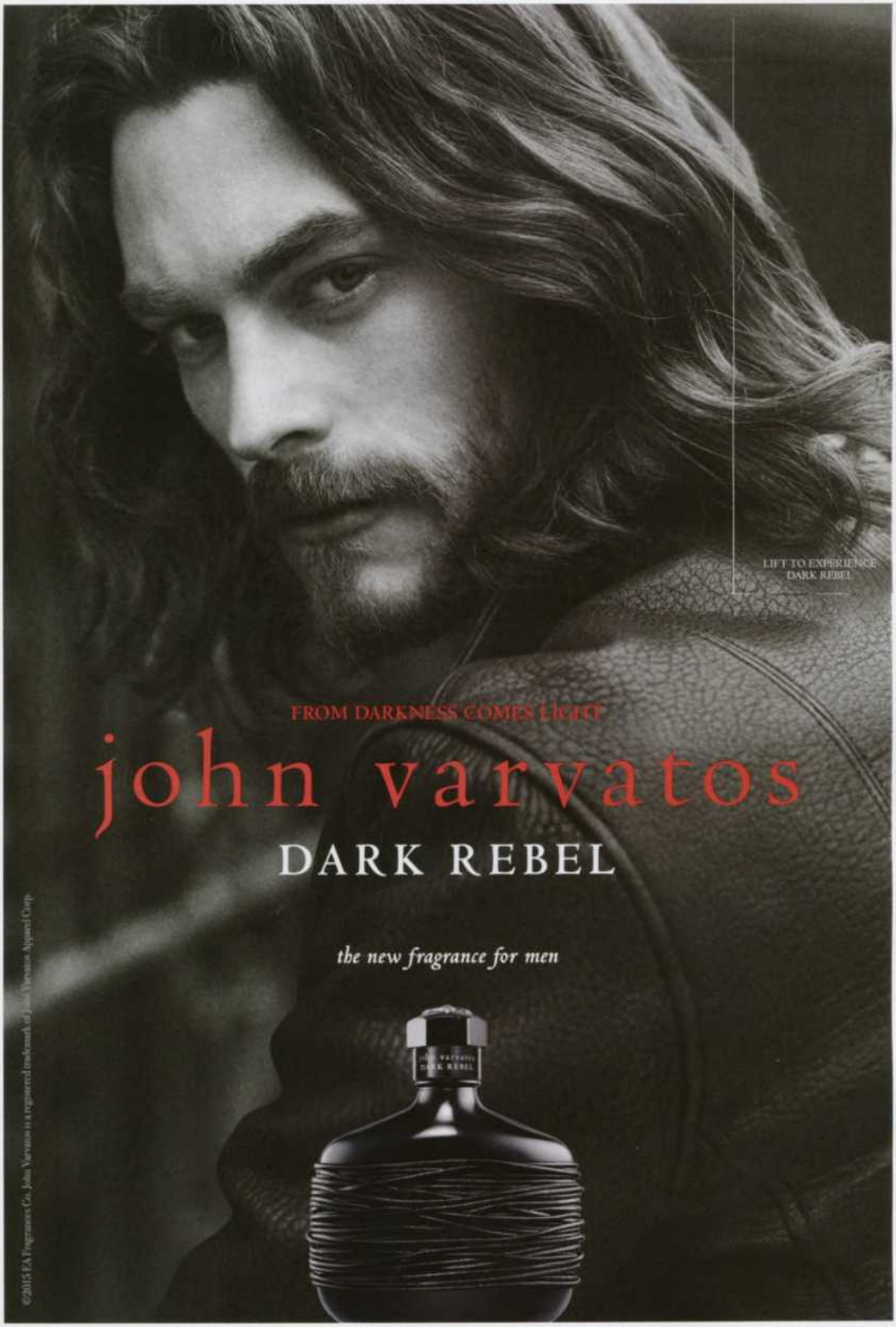
SUCCESSFUL AS she is, Jones is always dreaming about the next incarnation of her current life. "I would love to write a book, live in a different country, go back to school, take a really intensive music-theory course. I would love to change careers a couple times."

ONE SMALL task Jones might want to accomplish first, though: "My Twitter bio is still 'Time to change my bio.' I'm obviously not great at self-branding!" —JULIE MILLER

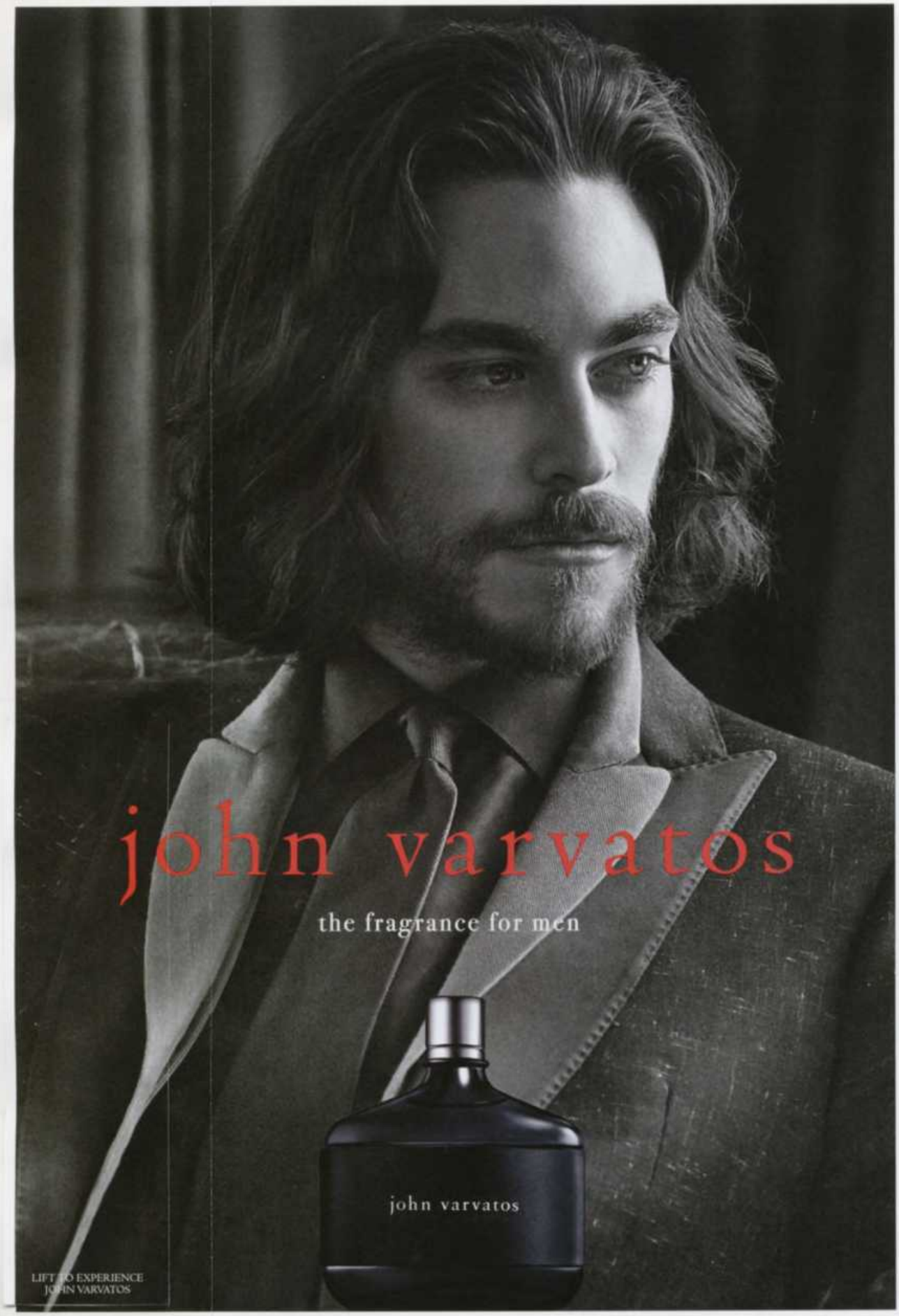
"I KIND OF LOST MY MIND FOR A COUPLE YEARS."

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PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICK ECCLESINE



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Out to Lunch with

DITA VON TEESE

BURLESQUE'S BEGUILING QUEEN HAS A LAVISH NEW BOOK, *YOUR BEAUTY MARK*



By **JOHN HEILPERN**

Dita Von Teese, the Meryl Streep of burlesque, met me for lunch at her restaurant of choice, the Russian Tea Room, in Manhattan—and you can't get more retro than *that.* The restaurant was founded by members of the Imperial Ballet in 1927, and Ms. Von Teese, who trained to become a ballerina before turning to life as an haute stripper, is herself the remarkable embodiment of a retro Vargas pinup girl from the 40s and 50s.

As she settled into our booth and admired the room's whimsical opulence, she said unself-consciously, "I like to go places where the elderly hang out."

She is fun, and she is her own invention. She appears, disarmingly, to inhabit a parallel universe. Among her early influences: the golden era of Hollywood films and musicals; the pinup sweetheart of World War II, Betty Grable; and the original queen of burlesque, Gypsy Rose Lee. "I'm proud to say that stripping to music onstage is an American invention," she said. "Burlesque was thriving here in the 1930s, whereas the landmark Crazy Horse, in Paris, didn't open until 1951, after its founder saw Lili St. Cyr perform in a bathtub in America."

Ms. Von Teese is a scholar in her field. "Who was Evangeline the Oyster Girl?" I asked. "Her real name was Kitty West," she replied. "She was a pretty great New Orleans performer with green hair who would come out of a big oyster shell and mate with a pearl."

Dita Von Teese's real name is Heather Renée Sweet, and she was born in working-class rural Michigan in 1972, the daughter of a machinist and a manicurist. She now lives in a swell 1920s Tudor Revival house in Los Angeles. "I'm a natural blonde, you know," she confided, and perhaps one would never suspect it, even when she's performing. "That's what G-strings are for," she explained with her customary tact.

Her perfectly coiffed hair is jet black, her lips red, her beauty mark a discreetly suggestive tattoo on porcelain skin, her everyday clothes high-fashion vintage. She has appeared on the International Best-Dressed List. (Among her biggest fans: Marc Jacobs, Christian Louboutin, Jean Paul Gaultier.) She gives artifice a good name.

"But what's Heather Sweet like?" I asked.

"I feel so docile. It's me, but it's not. It's not who I choose to be. Heather Sweet from Michigan has no confidence. She's shy."

"Dita," I said, "shy girls don't perform naked in public."

"But I wouldn't stand there buck naked. I have beautiful lighting everywhere, rhinestones everywhere, feathers everywhere. I wear layers of body makeup. It's all super-controlled. And it's a far cry from the person I really am."

She appears so perfectly contrived in public, it's become the real thing. She's a beguilingly flawless illusion—"a genuine fake," as she pointed out about herself, happily quoting her friend David Downton, the fashion illustrator.

We were meeting at the Russian Tea Room to celebrate her latest evangelistic work on behalf of the beautification of women, a 400-page illustrated book called *Your Beauty Mark: The Ultimate Guide to Eccentric Glamour* (published this month by Dey Street Books). "I'm not going to mow into a cheeseburger," she said. "It's the discipline of glamour." She skipped the Business Express Lunch menu in favor of more festive, glamour-appropriate fare—a glass or two of Moët & Chandon Impérial champagne, a tasting of caviar blini, and a red-caviar omelet.

Who attends her burlesque shows?

"Women and gays mostly," she said. "Straight men who accompany women appreciate it because the women are getting into the *spirit.*" Her venues are international; the audiences vary from 700 to 3,500. But, she added guilelessly, "I know there's going to be people reading this that are thinking, Oh, jeez, so she's a stripper with more rhinestones and feathers than a pole dancer. Whatever. I know people have to see my show to understand it."

Perhaps only the most humorless kind of feminist would disapprove, however, of one of Dita's signature acts, in which she frolics naked in a giant martini glass. But many more women find it all harmless fun—along with some major corporations. She performed at the opening of the Louis Vuitton flagship store in Paris, as well as for Cartier, when she emerged, dripping in diamonds, from a red Cartier box.

She now designs her own international lingerie line, called Dita Von Teese. It turns out that she worked in a department store fitting bras from age 16 to 24. Her early obsession with lingerie, and corsets in particular, she told me, set her on the road to pinup girl and burlesque queen.

@vf.com
To see **VIDEO** from the shoot, go to VF.COM/HOLIDAY2015/2016.

And her personal life? Her marriage to androgynous Gothic rock ghoul Marilyn Manson was brief. She explained that part of the problem was that they had both created their own illusion. But while she was still quite proud to be known as Heather Sweet from Michigan, Marilyn Manson wouldn't acknowledge that he was really Brian Warner from Ohio.

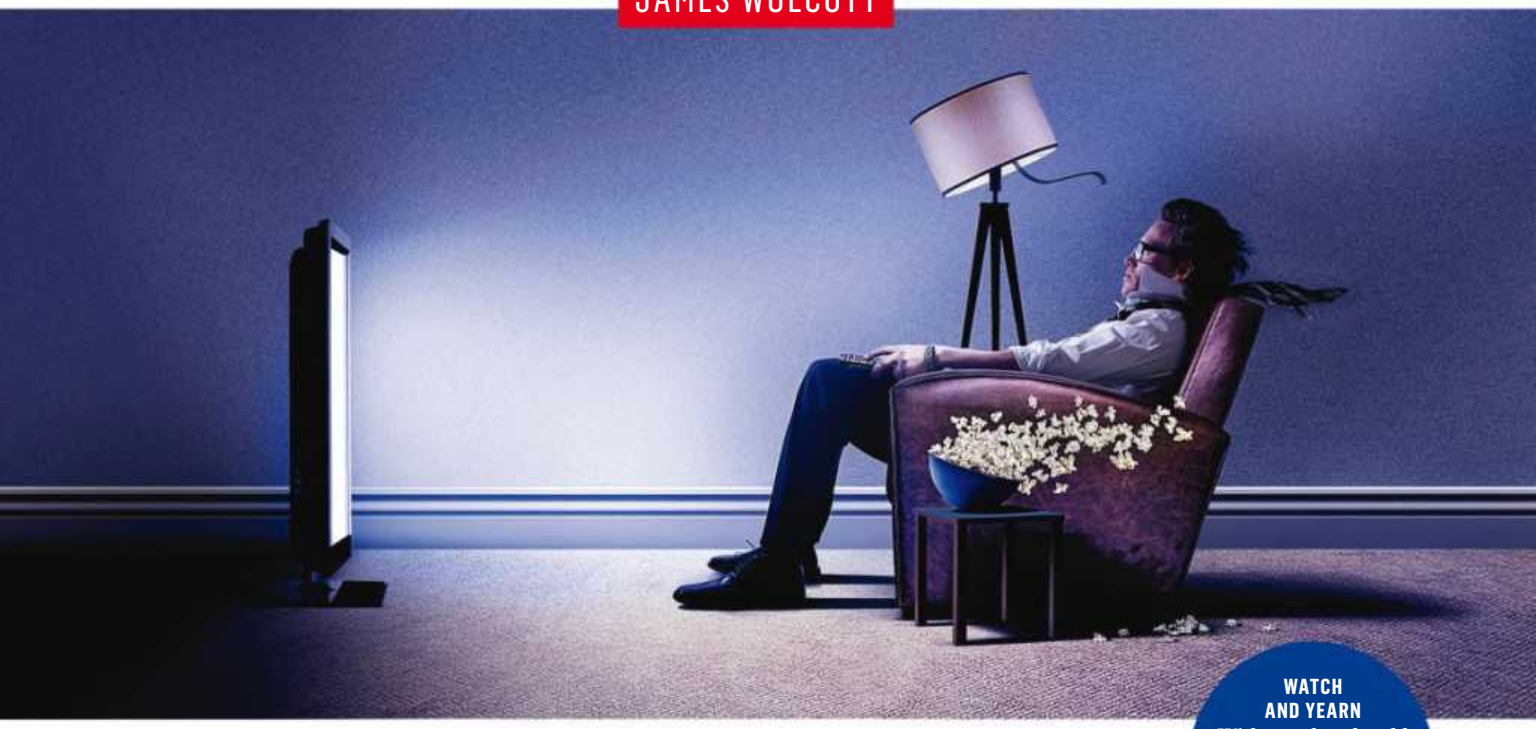
"I'M A NATURAL BLONDE, YOU KNOW."

She has now lived cozily for two years with a Chicagoan who's a graphic designer at Disney. "I hope you don't mind my asking this," I said. "Who does your man wake up to—Heather Sweet or Dita Von Teese?"

"I think he has the best and the worst of both," she said. □

STYLED BY LAURA DUNCAN; DRESS BY GEORGES CHAKRA; GLOVES BY DITA VON TEESE; EARRINGS BY HARRY KOTLAR; HAIR PRODUCTS BY VINE DE LA VIE; MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY MAC; HAIR BY JOHN BLAINE; MAKEUP BY GREGORY ARIT; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

JAMES WOLCOTT



WATCH AND YEARN With a nod to the old Maxell ad, this viewer is blown away by the overabundance of TV-series options.

TOO-MUCH-TO-SEE TV

With more than 400 original scripted series projected for 2016, one network executive recently voiced a heresy: There's too much television. But the author, test-driving the newest shows, has another problem—finding one that's a keeper

Are we approaching maximum eyeball overload? This August, John Landgraf, C.E.O. of FX, the feisty network that sprang *Louie, The Americans,* and the now departed motorcycle thrasher, *Sons of Anarchy,* on the unsuspecting, caused a ripple at the Television Critics Association Summer Press Tour when he projected that in 2016 more than 400 original scripted series will be produced, initiating a tipping point at which "Peak TV" begins to subside and contraction begins. "This is simply too much television," he told the assembled junketeers. Too much television?! Unthinkable! Practically un-American! Landgraf's prognostication and pessimistic tone received the requisite amount of reflexive pushback on the Internet, but the woeful lament of "too much television" was a blues number I could relate to, as a former pro.

I had it easy. When I began reviewing television, in those pre-pixel days when sooty newsprint made every issue of *The Village Voice* a chimney sweep's delight, only three major networks (ABC, CBS, NBC), plus PBS, fed the pipeline to the picture tube. Cable and its wonders to behold were in the incubation stage. Tony Soprano wasn't yet a dark twinkle in David Chase's eye. At the mercy of advertisers and Nielsen ratings, the Big Three's prime time was a lot dreckier then than it is now. Three-camera sitcoms and police/medical dramas shot in studio back lots were still the routine, but this had its upside, making it faster to pick out the gold nuggets amid the plastic recycles and rust jobs. Apart from made-for-TV movies, ambitious mini-series, and BBC imports (parasol'd costume dramas which made PBS the Victoria and Albert Museum of Fine Viewing), few shows screened in advance. You either watched live with a notepad or recorded the episode on the bohunkus VHS machine whose timer never seemed to work. It may have been technologically primitive out there on the pioneer prairie, but televi-

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BIX BURKHART (CHAIR), CHAD JOHNSTON (MAN), KARAM MIRI (TELEVISION), MORTEN OLSEN (POPCORN), ALL FROM GETTY IMAGES

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DARROW

CLARA BINGHAM // BUZZ BISSINGER // MARK BOWDEN // BRYAN BURROUGH // MARK SEAL // AND MORE...

MURDER, SCANDAL, LUST, GREED

A TV series ripped from the pages of *Vanity Fair*



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sion wasn't a year-long, heavy-content drop load, as it is now. It was a bountiful autumn harvest, as returning shows and freshman entries crowded onto the campus, brimming with anticipation, making the Fall Preview issue of *TV Guide* the Montgomery Ward catalogue of prime time, the dream book where we got our first amused, horrified glimpses of *B. J. and the Bear* and *Grandpa Goes to Washington.* TV was a manageable beat to cover as a columnist, and fun—unweighted by the cultural significance and dense pretension it has since acquired. TV commanded far less headspace then, leaving room for other pursuits, such as living. Were I to resume TV reviewing as a dedicated endeavor, I would have to set aside my Captain Video helmet of yore and acquire six sets of auxiliary eyeballs tendriled to Hillary Clinton's private server just to keep up with the kaleidoscopic bombardment of too much creativity for one mortal mind to handle. *Marvel's Daredevil, Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt, The Knick, Bloodline, Rectify, The Leftovers, The Returned, House of Cards, American Horror Story, Humans, Halt and Catch Fire, Transparent, Silicon Valley, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend, Ballers, The Brink, Catastrophe, The Man in the High Castle, The Affair, The Good Wife, Scandal, You're the Worst*—all this to choose from and here I am watching Christina El Moussa making *ewww* faces at mouse dung on *Flip or Flop* (HGTV). The cultural guilt, it's getting to me.

With the multitude of shows tugging at one's lobes, not just on TV but on Hulu, Netflix, Yahoo TV, Crackle, and Amazon Prime, the winnowing process has become that much more exacting. It's like having Victorian triple-decker novels being hurled at you from every direction. So much stuff, so little time—what's a jittery soul to do? Most quality series today don't offer self-contained, stand-alone episodes neatly resolved in a *Rockford Files* freeze-frame, allowing you to drop in for an hour, hang out, and get acquainted; they've evolved into full-bodied, elaborately woven sagas that enlist your acute focus and anchoring devotion, an emotional stake in the voyage. If you don't begin at the beginning, at the origin story, how can you fully appreciate the characters' phylogeny? It might be different if I were a binge viewer. Then I could consume the debut season of an ambitious undertaking such as the Wachowskis' *Sense8* and the crime drama *Narcos,* both on Netflix, over the course of a single debauched marathon viewing and stagger out into the scratchy sunlight like Ray Milland in *The Lost Weekend,* but that's really not the healthiest way to keep things hopping. I prefer to proceed at a more considered pace. Whenever I test-drive a new series, something bold, inventive, provocative, darkly comic, daringly transgressive, a show that boomerangs time and space and bulges with actors who barely move their lips and heroically pose like Rin Tin Tin on a hilltop, I ask myself, "Is this the beginning of a meaningful relationship? Am I truly ready to commit? How much more heartache can I take?" I still feel slightly betrayed by what a wet mutt that last season of *The Killing* was, and the sophomore year of *True Detective* was like a bad affair that will forever stain one's memories of Madrid.

Quality alone isn't enough to ensure that a show is a keeper. I acknowledge the brilliance and spooky, brain-zapped disorientation of *Mr. Robot* (USA Network), its disjointed compositions reflecting the skewed consciousness of its protagonist, its abstract, fugue-state exteriors an ingenious soldering of *Eyes Wide Shut, The Matrix,* and *Fight Club;* it's a trip, man. But after a couple of episodes, I found I wasn't enjoying its oxygen-deprivation effects, and it became evident that Christian Slater, likable actor though he is, had a whole lot more scenery ahead to masticate as the renegade hacker. I skipped the next episode and the spell was broken, and off I went in search of another regular fix.

Like many a New Yorker, I had a good scoff at the subway posters this summer for *Blindspot* (NBC), which showcased the illustrated epidermis of a bare-shouldered beauty whose tattoos were clues to spectacular crimes yet unperpetrated; her figure was one curving treasure-map tapestry of code. *Blindspot* looked so preposterous that the only option was to tune in to the premiere, and as the opening sequence unfolded—the show's Jane Doe emerging from a zippered bag in the middle of a Times Square vacated for the bomb-disposal team like a frightened, fragile alien from a seedpod—I thought, Wow, this thing's going to be a hit. Unlike so many shows, it didn't need critical acclaim to push it uphill. It's so high-concept that it leaves the petty bonds of shamelessness behind, and its female star, Jaimie Alexander, brings the jawline and eyes of a younger Elizabeth McGovern to her character's martial-arts frenzies, an improbable combination that works. But, as with *Mr. Robot,* by Episode Three the infatuation had tapered. A gunfight inside the Statue of Liberty; a domestic drone attack reducing a house to flying splinters; brutal, bashing hand-to-hand combat that leaves behind a decorative nick or bruise (in real life it would produce broken ribs, internal bleeding, concussions)—the willing suspension of disbelief stretches only so far before it snaps, and I have an increasingly political-moral objection to these high-tech post-9/11 terrorism/serial-killer TV thrillers where the F.B.I., C.I.A., elite police agencies, and shadowy adjuncts to the surveillance super-state are able to track everyone, eavesdrop, suck up private data with a mouse click, and uncork swarms of SWAT teams to bash down doors and provide overkill backup. It's a false insecurity that's being peddled (terrorist masterminds aren't taking near the toll on Americans that gun nuts on a slaughter spree and trigger-itchy cops are), and such elite-ops whizbangers foster a mystique of forensic capability and magnum force that teeters on fascist machismo, no matter how progressive the casting choices may be.

A good comedy is even harder to find, not only because humor is a more subjective taste than susceptibility to the tension mechanisms, buildups of dread, and barometric mood alterations of the dramatic-narrative playbook, but also because the cheaper costs of production lead to a litter of copycats. So many of these copycats pitch to a young demographic, their dithering exploits revolving around the mating habits of Millennial child-men and manic pixie women stuck on the merry-go-round of a going-nowhere economy—*Friends* with a Facebook status update. (A charming exception: Netflix's *Grace and Frankie,* starring Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin as odd-couple divorcées.) Although the shows are geared for laughs, there's often an underlying sourness, an indie/post-mumblecore malaise that expresses itself in impotent sarcasm, if that's your idea of a good time, as Pauline Kael might have said. One of the things that make Chelsea Peretti so nonpareil on *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is the hang-gliding lift of her inflections, but the prevailing mode on a comedy such as *Casual* (a Hulu original) is an ironic monotone that seems the last vestige of 80s minimalist fiction, but meaner, the lipless put-downs pushed through a coin slot.

The newest trendies may not be for me, but they may appeal to others, and yet how many other "others" are there? There's a striking disparity between the online hoopla and advocacy for certain shows and the actual interest from viewers, a widening divergence. An underdog comedy such as *You're the Worst,* touted as one of the best shows you're not watching, shifts from FX to FXX, and, despite a rally-'round-the-flag campaign from its critical fan club during the summer, plays to even punier ratings in the fall. Whatever its antic virtues, it's another show getting lost in the shuffle, confirming Landgraf's fretful prophecy. Meanwhile, as I sit here at the computer, the second season of Steven Soderbergh's *The Knick* is about to start. I still haven't watched any of the first season. I am never, ever, never going to catch up. □

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To visit James Wolcott's **BLOG**, go to VF.COM/WOLCOTT.

Tuning in to the World



JOHNNY DEPP AND THE HOLLYWOOD VAMPIRES FLIP THE SCRIPT IN RIO

When it comes to rock music and hearing loss, the relationship has always been crystal clear: overexposure to one leads to the other. While that's still true, one band has turned this truth on its ear, bringing the gift of hearing to more than 200 children and adults in Rio de Janeiro and offering many of them their very first opportunity to experience music of any kind. This past September, the supergroup Hollywood Vampires, featuring Alice Cooper, Johnny Depp, Joe Perry, Duff McKagan, Matt Sorum, Bruce Witkin and Tommy Henriksen, led a group of other enthusiastic celebrities and musicians (including Amber Heard, Sergio Mendes, Zak Starkey and Queens of the Stone Age) in Starkey Hearing Foundation's mission to fit those struggling with hearing loss with life-changing hearing aids. Many, who were able to hear their families and friends for the first time, were treated to a free concert by the band at the Rock in Rio Festival.



CHARLIZE THERON REACHES OUT & MAKES A JOYFUL NOISE IN SOUTH AFRICA

In conjunction with her Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project (CTAOP) to keep African youth safe from HIV/AIDS, the Oscar-winning superstar joined Starkey Hearing Foundation in South Africa, helping to fit more than 300 children with hearing aids. In a community center near King William's Town, Theron watched in delight as children received hearing aids and heard their first clear sounds.



Theron, whose organization funds many community-based NGOs in South Africa, was hands-on in this effort, helping a local acoustician fit the hearing aids. Once the aids were in place, she made playful sounds in the children's ears to test their hearing, provoking peals of laughter and even a bit of jumping for joy among the hearing aid recipients and volunteers alike.

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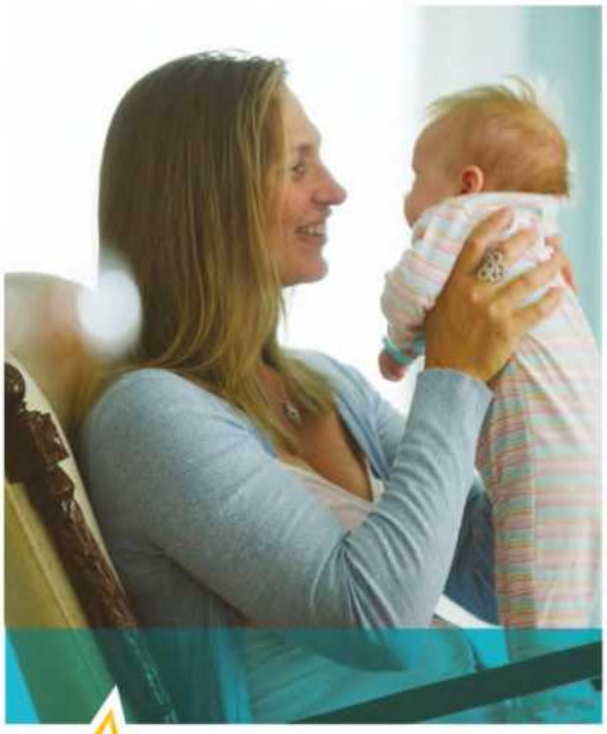
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VANITY FAIR NOMINATES: *CARNEGIE MEDALISTS*



The 2015 Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy honorees: David M. Rubenstein, Richard Menschel (standing), Robert Menschel, Jon M. Huntsman Sr., David Haas, Thomas Haas, Jeremy Grantham, Hanne Grantham, Paul Allen, Joan and Irwin Jacobs, and (accepting on behalf of Charles Feeney) Leslie Feeney Baily, Caroleen Feeney, and Christopher Oechsli; photographed at the New York Public Library.

You hear a lot these days about the coming "new golden age" in American philanthropy. Members of Gen X and Gen Y—some of them billionaires by their own efforts, the rest of them about to inherit $40 trillion from baby-boom parents—are said to be looking for ways to make a mark. Let's hope so. The bar set by previous golden ages is high. In towns all across America you can pick out an Andrew Carnegie library from half a mile away—he built more than 1,500 of them. Carnegie was a tough-minded industrialist whose maxims have a Sorkin-esque, Silicon Valley ring: "The first man gets the oyster. The second man gets the shell." His perspective changed when he turned to good works. "As I grow older," he once said, "I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do." As a flinty Scot, Carnegie believed that, in terms of efficiency and know-how, helping people out could be as much a "business" as manufacturing chemicals or building ships.

In 2001, the institutions that grew out of Andrew Carnegie's vast endowment—essentially, the proceeds from the sale of Carnegie Steel to J. P. Morgan's newly formed U.S. Steel a century earlier—banded together to create the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy. It is very much a "watch what they do" award: the medal is conferred for the achievement of "real and permanent good"—not exactly a low bar. This year's recipients are Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen; the duty-free-shop entrepreneur Charles Feeney, founder of the Atlantic Philanthropies; Hanne and Jeremy Grantham, supporters of climate-change research; the Haas family, longtime funders and stewards of Philadelphia's William Penn Foundation; Jon M. Huntsman Sr., one of the largest individual philanthropic donors in the country; Joan and Irwin Jacobs, major donors to universities and to science and engineering; Richard and Robert Menschel, active on behalf of many causes; and David M. Rubenstein, co-founder of the Carlyle Group, whose support has helped a variety of educational and cultural institutions. Rubenstein, who in 2007 bought the last privately owned copy of Magna Carta (for $21 million; he promptly lent it to the National Archives), also donated funds to restore the Washington Monument and rebuild the Mulberry Row slave quarters at Monticello. Allen, Feeney, Huntsman, Rubenstein, and Joan and Irwin Jacobs are signatories of the Giving Pledge, vowing to donate more than half of their wealth to philanthropy.

—CULLEN MURPHY

STYLED BY SORAYA DAYANI; HAIR, MAKEUP, AND GROOMING BY BIRGITTE; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

SKETCHBOOK

By Donald Robertson



THE FIRST DOCTOR SAID DEPRESSION.

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MAGIC HOURS A twilight view of the Grand Canal, Venice, 2015. *Inset,* the author (right) with a fellow officer in a gondola near the Rialto Bridge, Venice, 1945.

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSION

Arriving in Venice as a young British officer, in 1945, he was dazzled. Now famous as a travel writer and transgender pioneer, the author recalls how the city launched her career and reflected her illusions

By **JAN MORRIS**

I.

On a morning of late spring in 2015, I step ashore from a water taxi onto the Piazzetta San Marco, in Venice, without doubt the most historically celebrated patch of waterfront in the world. Instantly I am in the very heart of La Serenissima, the Most Serene Venetian Republic, and all around me are the magnificent structures that long ago ruled an empire of the sea and are now icons of one of the earth's top tourist destinations. There they stand, gleaming in the Adriatic sun, campanile and clock tower, pillars and palaces. Endless crowds move about them, boats swarm before them, flags fly, a vast white liner slides by offshore. Café music sounds from somewhere, and the whole scene is alive with passion, pride, and profit—a living essence of hyperbole, the gaudiest of dreams.

Seventy years ago, on just such a day of early summer in 1945, I stepped ashore from a motor launch on this very same foreshore. Then as now the brave old structures greeted me, but not in swank or swagger then. No crowds swarmed, no music sounded. A battered warship lay silently offshore, brooding. The buildings looked shabby, the people too, and upon the scene, it seemed to me, there lay a mist of regret, another category

LARGE PHOTOGRAPH BY PIERRE ADENIS/LAIF/REDUX; INSET FROM THE COLLECTION OF JAN MORRIS



STYLE

Richard Mille Presents the RM 69 Erotic Tourbillon

Erotic timepieces are part of watchmaking history—often banned or confiscated because they broke with moral or religious customs. Richard Mille's new RM 69 Erotic Tourbillon plays on the desire to openly express passion through the mechanical timepiece's "oracle" complication, which sets off the rotation of three engraved rollers like Tibetan prayer wheels, displaying a random phrase of love. Activated by pressing a button at 10 o'clock, it plainly reveals the wearers' deepest desires. Learn more at **richardmille.com**.



JULIANNE MOORE

EVENT

Vanity Fair, Lionsgate, and Entertainment One Celebrate "Freeheld" at TIFF

On Sunday, September 13, *Vanity Fair* Executive West Coast Editor Krista Smith hosted a cocktail party to toast Lionsgate's film *Freeheld* during the Toronto International Film Festival. The celebration was presented by Hugo Boss, with support by Jaeger-LeCoultre, and took place at Montecito restaurant. *Freeheld* stars Julianne Moore, Ellen Page, and Michael Shannon were in attendance, along with director Peter Sollett, screenwriter Ron Nyswaner, and producers Kelly Bush Novak, Michael Shamberg, Stacey Sher, and James D. Stern. Other guests included Ruby Rose, Brie Larson, Catherine Hardwicke, Donald Glover and Ivan Reitman.



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NEAL BENEZRA AND ANNIE LEIBOVITZ

EVENT

SFMOMA

On November 3, 2015, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) drew more than 500 supporters of art and photography to the Regency Ballroom in San Francisco for an award dinner to celebrate photographer Annie Leibovitz, recipient of the museum's inaugural Contemporary Vision Award. Presented by SFMOMA's premier fund-raising auxiliary, the Modern Art Council, this award honors the extraordinary contributions of cultural leaders internationally. Proceeds from the event support SFMOMA's education and exhibition programs. To learn more, **visit www.sfmoma.org/cva.**

of dream. Venice, the old Eye of the World, was humiliated in defeat, occupied by the soldiers of lately hostile powers, and I was there as one of them, an 18-year-old subaltern of the British Army, callow, bemused, and not knowing what to expect.

As it turned out, during those several decades between my two landfalls, in 1945 and 2015, my small destiny was to be inextricably interwoven with the affairs of Venice itself, in swank as in humiliation, in delight as in poignancy: and so, white-haired and stumbling now, bemused still but not quite so callow, I settle down this morning with a gin fizz and a cappuccino, at a café table on a corner of the *piazzetta,* to recall my responses to this city down the years—to thank the British Army for first sending me here and La Serenissima for having me.

I CAN STILL HEAR THE CONSTANT RIPPLING OF THE TIDES. IT CHANGED MY LIFE.

II.

In 1945, at the end of the Second World War, my proud armored-cavalry regiment was about to be transferred from Italy to the Middle East, where other troubles were brewing. In the meantime we had a couple of months to spend under canvas in the Po Valley, not far from Venice, and one day my colonel summoned me to his tent and said he had some annoying news for me. High command had dictated that he must at once detach one of his junior officers for extra-regimental duties during the rest of our time in Italy, and he was very, very sorry to say that I had to be the one. What would those duties be?, I tentatively inquired, and he was clearly distressed to admit that, as an officer of the 9th Queen's Royal Lancers (founded 1715), for the next few weeks my menial job would be helping to run the motorboats of Venice, almost one and all requisitioned by the army. My heart decidedly did not sink. I saluted the dear man gratefully, perhaps divining that the gift he was giving me would illuminate my whole life thereafter.

The aura of ignominy which seemed to greet me when I stepped out of the boat that day turned out to be an old, old miasma of melancholy, and I loved it from the start. It was a century and more since the Serene Republic had come to an end, obliterated by Napoleon, and after sundry fluctuations of fortune Venice had become just another city of the Italian state. "Venice has preserved her independence during eleven centuries," Voltaire had written just 30 years before, "and I flatter myself will preserve it for ever." He was wrong, and the consequent air of regret still lingered, I came to suppose, from that cruel disillusionment.

Whatever its origins, this sensation bewitched me. I loved the city in its abjection. I loved the emptiness of it, the echoes of its footfalls, the plashing of its oars in the half-light, the gaunt, strange cries of the gondoliers as they navigated the crumbled corners of its canals. I lived with a fellow subaltern in the requisitioned palace of a diplomat, the two of us all alone in its labyrinthine chambers, full of strange bric-a-brac and faded portraits. To this very moment I can still hear, if I think about it, the constant rippling of the tides in the boathouse at the bottom of the garden—and sometimes, too, I can hear through the mists of memory the nighttime carousing of some older and more worldly soldiers than we were, who had commandeered a house for themselves somewhere out there in the dark, with girls and wines to go with it . . .

For Venice, I came to realize, was a redemptive city, and of course there was happiness there, too. Far from being enemies, the Venetians gave us only kindly welcomes. The war in Europe was over, the fighting was done, and in that moment of hiatus there was much relief. One of the few celebrated pleasure places still flourishing in the city was Harry's Bar, in pre-war days the famously expensive resort of Venetian patricians and international celebrities. I knew of its reputation, but one evening I determined to get myself some supper there. The entrance to the restaurant was unencouraging—in a narrow lane was a narrow door, dimly lit from inside, and when I diffidently pushed it open the immediate effect was chilling too. Cold and haughty faces stared back at me: smoky Venetian aristocrats and their expressionless ladies, dauntingly suave Americans in beautifully cut uniforms, languid English Guards officers oozing social maturity—all simultaneously pausing in their conversations, glasses and cigarettes in hand, to see what the world was bringing in.

I paused on the doorstep there, but as I did so I caught the eyes of the Venetians behind the bar, one at the cash desk, two others busy with trays and glasses. They all looked up, too, but their expressions were different. Their look seemed at once speculative, interested, amused, kind, and collusive. I loved that look, and it was, I came to think, a true look of Venice. It put me both at ease and on my guard, and it has kept me going back to Harry's Bar, with more or less the same sensations, from that day to this.

Then again, one of my few duties (which were happily ill-defined) was to escort visiting generals in my boats from the docks to their requisitioned hotels in the heart of the city. Battle-hardened as they were, after years of campaigning, they were generally tight-lipped, world-weary, and exhausted, and not much interested in their adolescent escorting officer.

As we chugged up the Grand Canal, though, past the sad, beautiful palaces one by one, under the old Rialto Bridge that Shylock knew, round the great sweep of the waterway, gradually their tired eyes brightened, their faces softened, until at last, when we arrived at the open lagoon, with the shine of its wide waters and the splendid old structures all around—lo, those generals were no more than middle-aged gentlemen after all, and when I saluted them good-bye we were no longer red-tabbed warriors and an un-warlike lieutenant, but just so many humans happy in the presence of the sublime.

III.

After the war, after Oxford, having married my Elizabeth and begotten children, having messed around in the higher journalism and having time and again been drawn back to Venice, I went to live in the city to write a book about it. So La Serenissima changed my life again, for the book dictated my literary career and has been in print ever since.

We found ourselves a top-floor apartment near the Accademia Gallery, with a mooring in the canal below for my boat—no longer a posh ex-magnate's launch seized by the military, but a rickety traditional craft called a *sandolo,* incongruously fitted with an outboard motor too powerful for its own good. In this engagingly perilous vehicle we roamed the city and its lagoon, around and about its intricate canals, up lonely creeks to the mysterious islands of its archipelago—some monasteries, some hospitals, some fortresses, one an asylum, one a prison, all infinitely suggestive to someone of my temperament.

The old boat was often half submerged with our two irrepressible little boys larking about amidships, and when they weren't out with us they went to local schools, easily learning to find their ways through the tan-

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gled lanes, across the myriad bridges from schoolroom to home. There Elizabeth and I were helped with housework, cooking, and folklore by Emilia, a delightful elderly lady from around the corner, whose equally talkative sister often dropped in for a chat and a glass of something.

So we became more or less Venetians ourselves. Everybody forgave our crude Italian and our nonexistent Venetian dialect, and it became a daily pleasure to do our shopping in the nearby market or from the fruit-and-vegetable barge moored permanently nearby. Just occasionally we treated ourselves at Harry's Bar, now restored to its old élan: more often, if we wanted to eat out, we went to one of the little bars and taverns in the back lanes, where the clientele and ambience were agreeable, even if the food was nothing to write home about.

In those years Venice seemed to me above all a domestic city. It was a busy port, of course, a middle-size provincial capital, and tourists were common enough, but seen from the inside, as it were, it was a place of deeply rooted working families, living lives much as their grandparents had lived them. Loyalties were local: every district, each with its own ancient church, also had its own small piazza, the hub of everything. An ancient wellhead stood in the center of such a place, with a water pump nearby, and there the shoppers gossiped, the old men reminisced, cats basked in the sunshine, pigeons bathed in the pump, children hilariously chased one another here and there, and often I sat at a corner café table in the lee of the towering church—frequently plunged in doing nothing, but now and then writing a paragraph for my book.

It was simple, provincial-town living—close-knit, ordinary enough in most ways. But, for me, always present there, far beyond the ordinary, was the shimmering *idea* of Venice, and this alliance of the unassuming and the glorious, maintained as I interpreted it in universal kindliness, marvelously sustained my imagination.

One day the Queen of England turned up. Her royal yacht *Britannia* sailed into the lagoon preceded by a destroyer belonging to the Royal Navy. Upon its forward gun turret a kilted piper played, and his music sounded plaintive and sweet across the water. The most truly Venetian moment, though, occurred later in the visit, when the great-great-granddaughter of the Queen-Empress Victoria was rowed up the Grand Canal in a gondola and disembarked at one of the grander palaces. Getting out of a gondola is never easy (as I know better now), but the solution achieved by her elderly gondolier that day was wonderfully authentic to Venice. Gently, softly, as he might help an aging relative, he more or less lifted Her Majesty bodily in his arms and deposited her with an avuncular smile upon the quayside.

IV.

Of course we were not really Venetians, except in my imagination. It was only a fond dream, and we could not stay forever. Emilia and her sister said tear-muffled good-byes when we left the apartment, sold the boat for a song, and went home to Wales. My book was published, the children grew up, others came along, and times changed. Venice, though, did not let me be. Again and again I went back there, and I wrote three more books about the place—one about its lost empire, one about its animals, one about my favorite Venetian artist, Vittore Carpaccio—not to mention a few thousand articles about the city to help pay the school bills. I met with old friends there. I looked up Emilia. I stayed in whatever hotel took my fancy, I wrote as I wan-



FLOAT ON The 3,500-passenger cruise ship *Divina* sails into view, St. Mark's Basin, June 2, 2012.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARCO SECCHI/GETTY IMAGES


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dered, and as the centuries shifted around me, so La Serenissima shifted, too. A new Venetian era was opening, and an allegorical experience signaled the moment for me.

It was like this. For my money the noblest of all the Venetian symbols was the quadriga of golden bronze horses which had stood for centuries on the façade of St. Mark's Basilica, above its main door. They had arrived there as loot, carried home from Constantinople in 1204 when the Venetians of the Fourth Crusade had brought the Byzantine Empire to its knees. They had long been the ultimate trophies of the republic's triumphant history—briefly stolen again when Napoleon had them sent to Paris, but soon restored to their aerie above the great piazza. They were glorious animals, gleaming slightly with the patina of the ages and looking at one another in a touchingly fraternal way.

I greatly admired them. Sometimes I fancifully hailed them up there, on my way home to bed, and they always graciously responded. One morning, though, I looked at them as usual and discovered that those masterful animals, for so long a living inspiration for me, had been replaced with dullard replicas. These were exact in physiognomy but utterly without numen. They were expert, they were handsome, they were probably necessary, but they were sham. Perhaps tourists did not notice the substitution, preservationists certainly welcomed it, and doubtless many real citizens did not care one way or the other (Emilia, for instance). I did care, though, and deprived of their inner radiance the Four Horses became for me memorials to the decline and fall of my personal, private Venice.

Perhaps it was inevitable. Gradually, decade by decade, the fabric of the place had been rotting. Palaces had decayed, bridges had begun to crumble, ever rising tides meant that much of the city was perennially flooded. Around the world, lovers of Venice had woken up to its decay, and money had flooded in for restoration and repair. Whole segments were perpetually under scaffolding, and the effects of corrosion meant that statues and carvings everywhere found themselves reconstituted. So it was with the Golden Horses, and for me it all signified Venice's decline from civic authenticity to the condition of a museum—the most marvelous of all museums indeed, but short on reality.

So as Venice entered the 21st century, overwhelmingly its principal industry was tourism, and each time I went back there the more artificial the city seemed. The luxury stores of the center became ever more luxurious, while many a little shop of my acquaintance—fruiterer, cobbler, or bookstore—succumbed to the tinsel gaudy of tourism and was loaded with souvenirs and comical masks. Many Venetians had abandoned their homes for the mainland, where life was cheaper; many richer city folk, Romans and Milanese, had replaced them. The numerous feral cats of the city, old friends of mine, had been cleared away for health reasons. New hotels had sprung into being everywhere. Many of the palaces of the Grand Canal itself had become hotels, and many of the scattered islands of the lagoon, too, whose lonely mysteries I had so assiduously explored half a lifetime before, were now as often as not luxury hostelries. And frequently one might see, dwarfing the most splendid ancient monuments of La Serenissima, immense, unlovely cruise liners disembarking their thousands of visitors for a day of guided sightseeing.

V.

It was all a performance, I thought, but then, who was I to talk? I had spent my own Venetian years in voluntary self-delusion. It was my own personal Venice that I had fostered, my own dream of it. Mine was that old melancholy, mine the sweet charm of the neighborhoods. Through the years I had ignored the politics of the place, its frequent scandals, snobberies, and resentments, even the growing threat of inundation and the endless controversies of development. This new Venice, though, was not one I had invented for myself. It was not mine. As I wrote in a later edition of my original Venice book (which was really only a distillation of my successive dreams), while I marveled at the old place still and admired its new successes, I felt I was no longer in love with it.

And yet … As I potter about it now, or sit as always with my notebook in one of those small piazzas, where the water pump trickles still and the Emilias gossip, my own long-held illusions linger. It is a city of redemption, and still, like those old generals of my youth, I find myself once again seduced by its presence. After all, is not the jangling, money-mad exuberance of today's Venice only an old fervor of La Serenissima brought up to date? The Piazza San Marco is just made for those seething tourist crowds, with their balloons, their fireworks, their selfies, and their chanting tour guides. Venice is still a place of learning, with a thriving university and a lively center of the arts, whose Biennale festival brings to Venice not only the latest in artistic thought from all over the world but also the hubbub of showbiz and dilettantism that goes with it. It is still the place, as it always was, for preposterously vulgar galas, weddings, and parties, and for myself I even welcome those hideous white cruise ships, looming over the glorious quayside to the distaste of all purists. They seem to me truly emblematic of Venice, the plutocratic sea city—brilliantly engineered, marvelously showy, and vastly profitable, just as the doges would have liked them to be in the glory days of old.

As for the simplicity of my Venice, well, it has not all been in my wishful imagination. In the quiet backstreet piazza where I am sitting now, not so very far from the flamboyances, two grandfathers are looking after their respective grandchildren, one a boy, one a girl, perhaps four or five years old. They are in fancy dress, I don't know why—perhaps left over from this year's Carnival—and as I watch, a little drama is played out before me. The boy, made up as a whiskered lion, is theatrically fierce; the girl, in swishing red skirts and petticoats, appears to be a princess of some sort and flounces winsomely around the square.

Alas, the performance has gone wrong. The lion loudly refuses to play. The princess storms off in tears. The two grandfathers urge each actor to cooperation, but in the end commiserate, shrug their shoulders, and leave them to it. I walk over to watch the dénouement of the action, together with a few bystanders, and presently those two little performers, urged on by us all, reluctantly give each other a not very heartfelt concluding kiss. One or two of us applaud.

That *is* my Venice. It is a dream of sorts, but it is true. I ask one of the grandfathers if they are all from that parish. Of course, he says. They are proper Venetians. "And did you know," he helpfully adds, "that our Venetian composer Vivaldi was christened in our church just over there?" It is time to go home, and as the children, stagily reconciled, are scurried giggling away down an alley, evening bells reassuringly ring out for me, across the jumbled old rooftops of the place. □

I LOVED THE EMPTINESS OF IT,
THE ECHOES OF ITS FOOTFALLS,
THE PLASHING OF ITS OARS IN THE HALF-LIGHT.

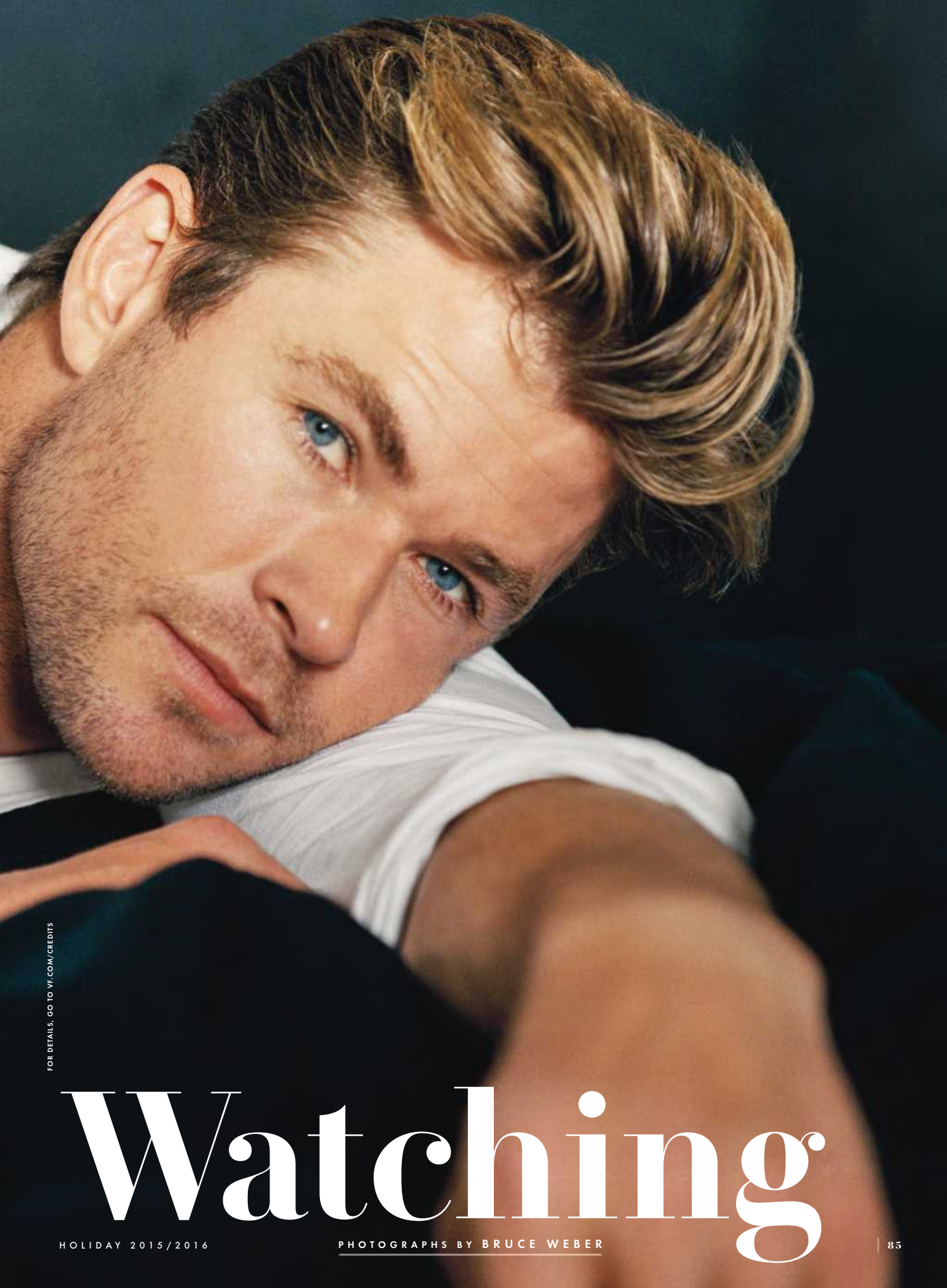


I GOT THE BLUES
Chris Hemsworth, photographed in Montauk, New York. In his first close-up for *The Cabin in the Woods*, director Joss Whedon said, "Oh my God, he's a movie star."

HEMSWORTH WEARS A SHIRT BY ACNE STUDIOS.

Chris Hemsworth has checked all the movie-star boxes: he's got the Marvel franchises, works with top directors, was *People*'s Sexiest Man Alive, lampooned his own success on *Saturday Night Live*, etc., etc. But as the 32-year-old actor headlines *In the Heart of the Sea* this month, LILI ANOLIK discovers Hemsworth's un-movie-starrish side—which may be his real-life superpower

Hemsworth



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Watching

HOLIDAY 2015/2016

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BRUCE WEBER

I feel like I'm in a movie. Not just any movie, a highly specific kind of movie, one of those trashy-but-sublime Hollywood jobs, a jet-set-y, South-of-France-y bit of chic piffle that's about international spies or jewel thieves or cat burglars, only is really about glamorous, sexy stars doing glamorous, sexy things in glamorous, sexy locales. Daft yet delectable; not art yet artful—*To Catch a Thief* or *Diamonds Are Forever* maybe. And in this highly specific movie, I'm in a highly specific scene: I'm sitting in a restaurant, open-air and umbrella-dotted, all very relaxed and casual in a way that suggests great expense and exclusivity, the patrons suntanned and sunglassed, the backdrop *el primo,* knockout spectacular, featuring an ocean that sparkles and fizzes like a sapphire, the exact color, by happy coincidence, of my dining companion's eyes. And a bit player—a waiter or, possibly, a fellow paying customer—leans into me and says, sotto voce, "Quite a view," and I, keeping my gaze fixed on the sapphire-eyed person across the table from me, reply, "It certainly is," my lips twitching in the faintest of ironic smiles.

O.K., well, the exchange with the waiter/paying customer never happened, but the rest of the account is cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die true. The restaurant: Geoffrey's, pronounced the way the snooty English butler from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* pronounced it, not the way the flesh-eating serial killer from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, pronounced it, and perched on a bluff above the Malibu stretch of the Pacific, which, for my money, knocks the Côte d'Azur right on its derrière. The sapphire-eyed person: Chris Hemsworth.

Movie-Star Light, Movie-Star Bright

In March, Hemsworth, 32, hosted *Saturday Night Live.* It was a strong show all around, but the best bit was a send-up of those American Express commercials that feature famous people presenting themselves in modest, no-frills, this-is-the-real-me ways that are actually self-congratulatory and carefully contrived and showbiz slick. Chris Hemsworth as "Chris Hemsworth" catalogues the various stumbling blocks he encountered on the Road to Success. In the signature faux-humble voice-over (the better to brag to you with, my dear), he says, "When I got to Hollywood, they said I'd never make it as an actor—they said I was too tall, too blond, my muscles were too big." The line got a roar from the studio audience. And why not? It was funny—and smart. After all, his handsomeness is so extreme it can't be denied or ignored, or even played down. It verges, in fact, on the parodic, so why not parody it?

Hemsworth is the most movie-starrish of his movie-star peers, by which I mean he's the best-looking. And, yes, I realize that standards of beauty are highly subjective, the eye of the beholder, tomato-tomahto, etc. But if Hemsworth isn't the fairest of the male-ingénue set, who is? Channing Tatum's a hot young hunk raring to go, and in terms of sheer sexiness, just raw, straight-up, wham-bam appeal, he's the winner, hands down. He also, however, has a beefcake quality. (He knows it, too, and uses it; it's part of what makes him such a sly—and amusing—presence on-screen.) Bradley Cooper is the guy who was out of your league in college. Not *that* out of your league, though. Like you might have gotten lucky with him if the lenses on his beer goggles were sufficiently thick and/or fogged and/or smeary. And, granted, Ryan Gosling and Jake Gyllenhaal are, like Hemsworth, bona fide heartthrobs, except they're an entirely different sub-species thereof—are less physically imposing, more sexually diffident, with an instinct for playing loners and oddballs. And then there's Tom Hardy, of the spooky-skeezy machismo. Yet while Hardy may have the bod of a leading man, he has the soul of a character actor.

Another point in Hemsworth's favor: he looks better in person than he does on-screen. Actually, he looks the same in person as he does on-screen, and thus better, since usually there's an in-real-life letdown. (*Wait, what?* He's *him—that guy? But that guy's a shrimp, a peewee, a short stuff!* Or—*But he has terrible skin! You could blow out a tire on those craters!*) Don't take my word for it, though. See for yourself.

A flashback to the moment he made his entrance:

Geoffrey's has a driveway that's a little like Lombard Street in San Francisco—twisty and on a treacherous incline. I was afraid my Uber driver's car, game but on the shitbox side, wouldn't be able to huff and puff back to the top, so I got out at the edge of the Pacific Coast Highway. As I walked, the journey extra vertiginous because I was in heels, I was passed by a man on a motorcycle. The man negotiated the hairpin turns without a hitch, stopping neatly in front of the valet. He dismounted, then removed his helmet, confirming what I already knew—that he was He, the Norse God of Thunder from Down Under (it's common knowledge that Hemsworth's Australian, right?), Thor. His skin was golden, hair too, though a darker shade of; eyes so purely blue they put the sky and water to shame. He was tall, well over six feet, and slim, made of muscle and sinew, rather than muscle and muscle, which is how he appears when he's in his hammer-wielding deity incarnation.

The hostess stand at Geoffrey's faces the valet, and the girls manning it—L.A. girls, jaded girls, girls who can do blasé with both hands tied behind their backs, girls who make it their business, their *style,* to be unimpressed—stopped breathing as he approached. When he got close, he smiled.

Let's talk about this smile for a second, since it's both startling and contradictory: it's killer, sure, highly trained assassin, white and broad and lustrous, but it's also nice-guy. There's a slightly abashed quality to it, too, as if he understands the impact his presence has on people and wants to soften the blow a little. (The smile, by the way, doesn't help. In fact, it makes everything worse. Because now you have to live with the knowledge that he's not just a lovely human but a lovely human being, that the insides match the outsides.)

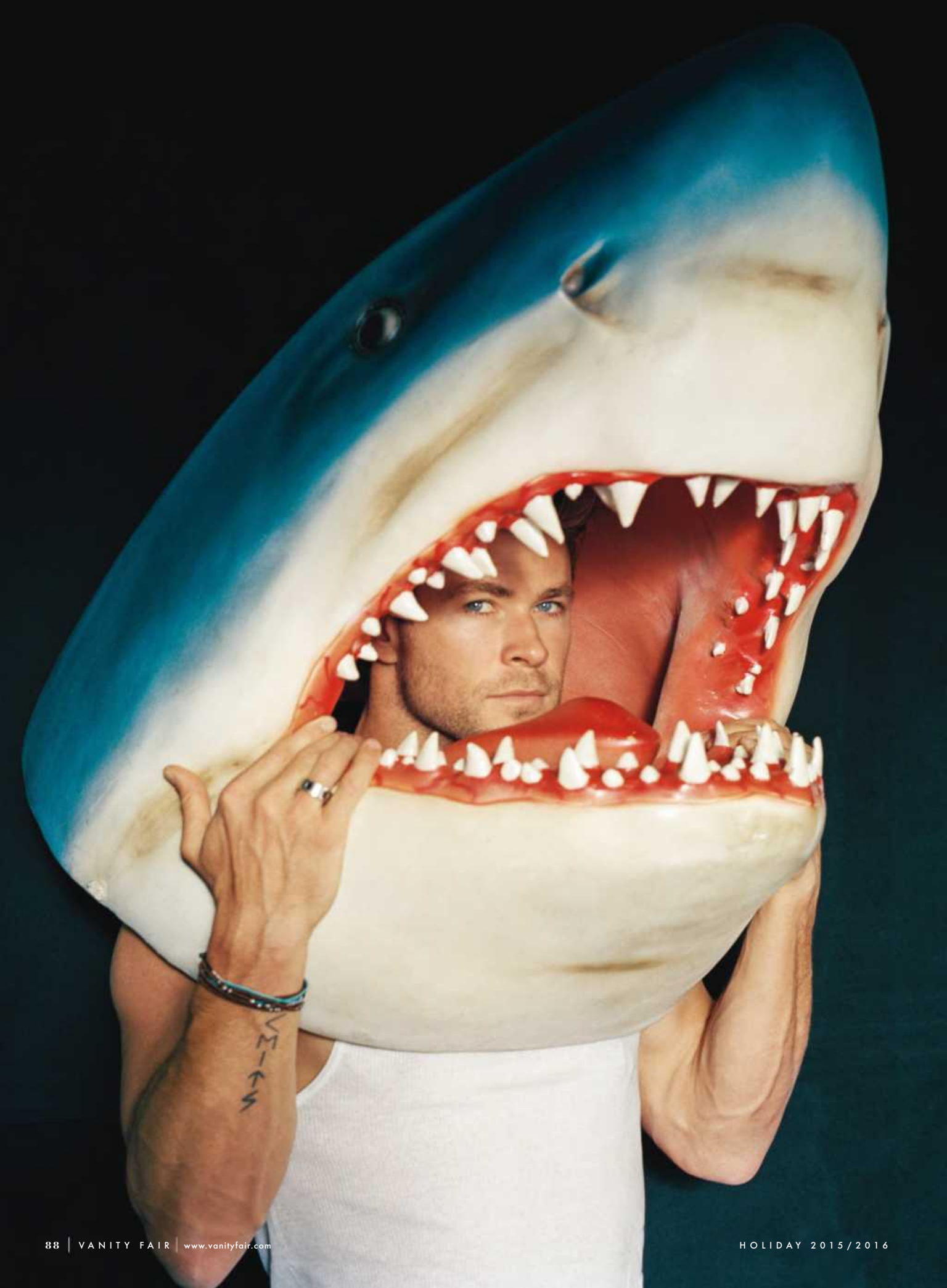
O.K., so flashing back to the flashback: I was 30 seconds behind Hemsworth entering the restaurant. I joined him at the bar, where we were to wait as our table was set up, only he wasn't at the bar to be joined. A beat of panic, then I realized he must have ducked into the men's room. Moments later, he emerged soaked. It looked as if he'd

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HELLO KITTY Hemsworth and some furry friends.

HEMSWORTH WEARS A TANK TOP BY CALVIN KLEIN UNDERWEAR.





KILLER SMILE
"We're there to … give each other perspective," Hemsworth says of siblings Liam and Luke, both actors. "[And] the right amount of slapping."

HEMSWORTH WEARS A COAT BY BURBERRY; JEANS BY RAG & BONE.

FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

taken a bath in the sink (hopefully the sink). And, as it turned out, that's exactly what he'd done. The day was hot, the temperature somewhere up in the high 90s, and he was cooking inside his leather jacket, necessary because of the motorcycle, a recent enthusiasm.

As one of the hostesses, her mask of bored vacancy back in place, showed us to our table, he told me about taking the riding test:

"My older brother, Luke, and I were talking about this the other day. He was laughing, said it was a classic example of how I prep for things. See, the test is its own thing. People told me that even if you're a great rider, you can screw it up. What you have to do is drive around in a circle twice in a space that's quite tight and narrow, zigzagging through cones without touching the ground. I drew the test out in chalk and tried to do it, and I was like, 'This is pretty hard, I'm going to fail.' And my friends who were watching said, 'Well, no, you kind of get it.' But I said, 'I have to 100 percent get it because there are no second chances.' So I spent the next two days just going in circles and zigzagging."

I'm sure I don't have to explain to you why this story is so disarming, but just in case: motorcycles are practically synonymous with outlaw macho up-yours defiance—hell on wheels. Even the trappings associated with the activity—denim and leather, shitkicker boots, skull-and-crossbones tattoos—are scary and freaky and S&M-y. Only Hemsworth utterly subverts the bad-boy implications by approaching riding in such an earnest and painstaking way, half Boy Scout, half worrywart. (Imagine Marlon Brando's Johnny Strabler making chalk outlines in preparation for a bike test. Imagine Marlon Brando's Johnny Strabler taking a bike test at all.) He's not just admitting to turning the rebel yell into a Mother, May I?, but, and by extension, to supreme uncoolness (a sign, of course, of supreme coolness). How could I be other than totally disarmed?

We sat down at our table, with the *el primo,* knockout spectacular view, which I really was too preoccupied to appreciate. We skimmed (our menus). We fiddled (with our devices—me, tape recorder; him, phone). We small-talked and small-listened—anything to avoid getting started. We got started.

Backstory

Hemsworth was raised in Melbourne, with the occasional foray into the Outback, his dad working in child-protective services most of the time, but other times mixing it up with cattle, making buffalo wish they'd never been born, popping wheelies on motorbikes—being a cross between a daredevil and a cowboy, basically, a true-life Crocodile Dundee. His mom was an English teacher. He's the middle of three boys, all of whom are actors, including younger brother Liam. Says Hemsworth, "Luke started acting. I followed his path, and then Liam followed mine. We're lucky. We're all there to help each other, give each other perspective, give each other the right amount of slapping as well."

At 18, with little formal training, Hemsworth landed a role on *Home and Away,* the long-running Australian soap and Hollywood farm team. (Among the alumni: Heath Ledger, Guy Pearce, Isla Fisher, and Naomi Watts.) For three and a half years, he played the troubled—but sexy!—Kim Hyde, who either had a death wish or death had a wish for him. (Kim survived a fire, two plane crashes—well, one plane crash, one helicopter crash—a cyclone, and an accidental Ecstasy overdose.) It was an earn-as-you-learn-type situation. The show was his acting school. And at this acting school he took Fame 101. ("It was a great place to get caught up in that sort of thing [i.e., teen-idol-dom] because no one really gave a shit, because it was just a soap opera and cell-phone cameras weren't as popular.")

In 2007, Hemsworth headed for L.A. and a chance at the big time. Almost immediately he was cast as George Kirk, the man who taught—or would have taught had he not played a game of starship chicken, and lost—Captain Kirk how to throw a baseball, tie a tie, put on a condom, the whole father-son rigmarole, in J. J. Abrams's reboot of *Star Trek* (2009). It was a promising start, only it proved to be a false one. Says Hemsworth, "There were eight months where just everything stopped. I got more and more anxious. I was about to pack it in. I had an audition before Christmas, and as I got on the plane, I thought, I don't give a shit anymore. I'm sick of caring." Now, eight months isn't exactly forever. And on the *S.N.L.* commercial, Hemsworth kidded the idea that he'd ever really struggled or dues-paid: "It didn't happen overnight for me. I bounced around Hollywood for days."

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But eight months isn't no time either, especially when you're a fretter by nature. Relief came in the form of Joss Whedon, who would discover Hemsworth—already kind of sort of discovered twice—once and for all. Whedon, along with Drew Goddard, cast Hemsworth in the movie he had auditioned for pre-boarding, *The Cabin in the Woods* (directed by Goddard, produced by Whedon, written by both), a piece of work as nasty as it was nifty, a riff on the schlocky gore-fest horror torture-porn genre (oh, *that* genre). Says Whedon, "In Chris's first close-up, Drew and I turned to each other and said, 'Oh my God, he's a movie star.'"

Not yet, but soon. Hemsworth on how it happened:

"I had an audition with Ken [Branagh, for *Thor*] that didn't go very well. I remember walking out thinking, Oh well, there goes that opportunity. Then one day Joss and Drew were reading the trades, and on the front was the final four for *Thor*. And they pointed to Liam and said, 'Hey, is that your brother?' And I said, 'Yeah.' And they said, 'Why the hell aren't you in the mix?' And I said, 'I didn't get a callback.' And they were like, 'This is crazy.' And I was like, 'If one of us gets it, that's cool.' And they were like, 'No way. That should be you.' And when casting opened back up, Joss called Ken and said, 'Give Chris another shot.'"

Branagh did, and the rest is Hollywood history or, I guess, Norse mythology. (Three fun facts. One: *The Cabin in the Woods* was released in 2012 but filmed in 2009, and it wasn't until 2010 that Whedon was hired to write and direct *The Avengers.* Says Hemsworth, "A year after *Cabin* I'm on the set of *Thor* and Joss comes walking in, and I'm like, What are you doing here? And he was like, Oh, I'm interviewing with the Marvel guys." So the former writer-producer was auditioning to—fingers crossed—direct the very star he helped make. Pretty cute, right? Like *A Star Is Born* without the sexual tension or the bummer ending. Two: when Whedon first clapped eyes on Hemsworth, he immediately thought, Captain America. "So, yeah," says Whedon, "I did think superhero, just, ah, slightly physically smaller superhero." Three: a short time after losing out to his big brother, Liam would win a role in a dinky little low-budget, under-the-radar, straight-to-DVD project you've probably never heard of called *The Hunger Games.* Says Hemsworth with a laugh, "Yeah, Liam's doing all right.")

Even if movies centering on guys in billowy capes with do-gooder hippie notions about saving the world don't make it for you, you've got to admit, Hemsworth's good as Thor. Looks-wise, he obviously nails it (from the *S.N.L.* commercial: "At my [*Thor*] audition, they said, Umm, we're looking for a Thor-type, not actual Thor"), though he did have to bulk up considerably, protein-scarfing and gym-bunnying until he'd packed on 20 pounds of lean muscle. He's poetic in the fighting scenes. He's prosaic—downright monosyllabic, in fact—in the talking scenes. And he never seems to take himself too seriously.

He and Natalie Portman, who plays astrophysicist and love interest Jane Foster, are like an updated version of Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan in the Tarzan movies: he grunts; she gets the message.

Hemsworth appears relaxed in the role, only he wasn't—the opposite. He felt the pressure. And I certainly understand why. The Marvel movies are, almost without exception, all-star affairs, featuring the heavenly-body likes of Scarlett Johansson, Robert Downey Jr., Mark Ruffalo, Samuel L. Jackson, Gwyneth Paltrow, Jeremy Renner, Robert Redford, Anthony Hopkins, et al. The movies, based, of course, on the comic books, seem maybe a little bit like kid stuff. But they offer massive exposure and an even more massive paycheck. Consequently, it's worth these actors' while to pretend that Halloween came a little early that year and put on a costume, try not to think about appearances they're contractually obligated to make at the next Comic-Con. These actors, though, are established, secure (if anyone in Hollywood is ever really secure). They have track records and fan bases, sometimes an Oscar. If their movie or spin-off doesn't net the studio a profit with a scary number of zeros in it, their careers aren't necessarily in the toilet. But for Hemsworth, the only one of "earth's mightiest heroes" who is—or, rather, was—a comparative nobody, the experience was far more fraught. "When something costs $150 million and it doesn't work, it's your face, it's your fault," he explains. "And the character has fans. Are they still a fan or did you just make them never want to read the comic again?"

Super Duper

OK., I'd like to take a detour now from Hemsworth's Road to Success. Actually, I'd like to bag the rest of the trip altogether. (This, after all, is a feature, not an American Express commercial.) We've brought him to the cusp of riches and fame beyond his wildest dreams, and that's far enough. Let's talk instead about the kind of actor he is.

To me, Hemsworth's a throwback, much more in the tradition of a Cary Grant or a Gary Cooper, actors who were products of studios not drama schools, actors who were elegant and immaculate and silky smooth, actors who were performers, there to bring the audience pleasure, than he is in the tradition of a Marlon Brando or a James Dean, the subsequent generation of actors, actors who mumbled and shuffled and picked and scratched, actors whose lack of polish wasn't just their aim but their point—their declaration—actors who were artists, there to express their inner beings. Yet the influence of Brando and Dean has been so powerful it virtually wiped out what came before. Sure, Hemsworth does that insane De Niro (also Method-trained) thing where he gains and loses tremendous amounts of weight for a role in frighteningly brief periods of time. But CONTINUED ON PAGE 140

COSTUMES DESIGNED BY CLAIRE ANDERSON; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY LORRAINE HILL

The ROYAL WHEE!



Bel Powley, Jack Reynor, Sarah Gadon, Rupert Everett, and Emily Watson, at Chatsworth House, in Derbyshire, England.

There is a long tradition of films—ranging from *Roman Holiday* to *The Prince and Me*—about royals going incognito as "normal" civilians as they attempt to break free from their sheltered existences and get a taste of "the real world." *A Royal Night Out*—which opened in the U.K. in May and makes its U.S. debut this month—takes that trope and applies it to none other than Queen Elizabeth, back when she was a teenage princess. The action takes place on V-E Night, in 1945, as World War II has come to a close and the streets of London are packed with revelers. Princess Elizabeth (played by *Dracula Untold*'s Sarah Gadon) and her more freewheeling sister, Princess Margaret (*The Diary of a Teenage Girl*'s Bel Powley), get permission from their parents, the King and Queen of England, to join in the fun. Elizabeth and Margaret go off into the night—to encounter, of course, unexpected obstacles, romantic misadventures, and comic shenanigans. (The conceit of the film is loosely based on the actual happenings of that night, though most of the plot here—Elizabeth learns how to ride a bus! Margaret flirts with a naval officer!—is pure historical fiction.)

The Canadian Gadon—who trained with a dialect coach and took Lindy Hop lessons to prepare for the role—said that the notion of playing a young Elizabeth was "extremely daunting." Her nerves ended up serving her well, though. "Elizabeth in the film is on the precipice of becoming a queen and leading a nation," she said. "So having the same kind of anxieties really helped me access that place." —JOSH DUBOFF

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLIE GRAY



Hal Prince

A musical revue celebrating the work of producer-director Hal Prince—six decades, 21 Tonys, shows including *Cabaret, Sweeney Todd, Evita,* and *The Phantom of the Opera*—just opened in Tokyo. But Prince is simultaneously adding to his legend, writes JIM KELLY, with an adaptation of the 2007 film *The Band's Visit* for Off Broadway. Photograph by ANNIE LEIBOVITZ



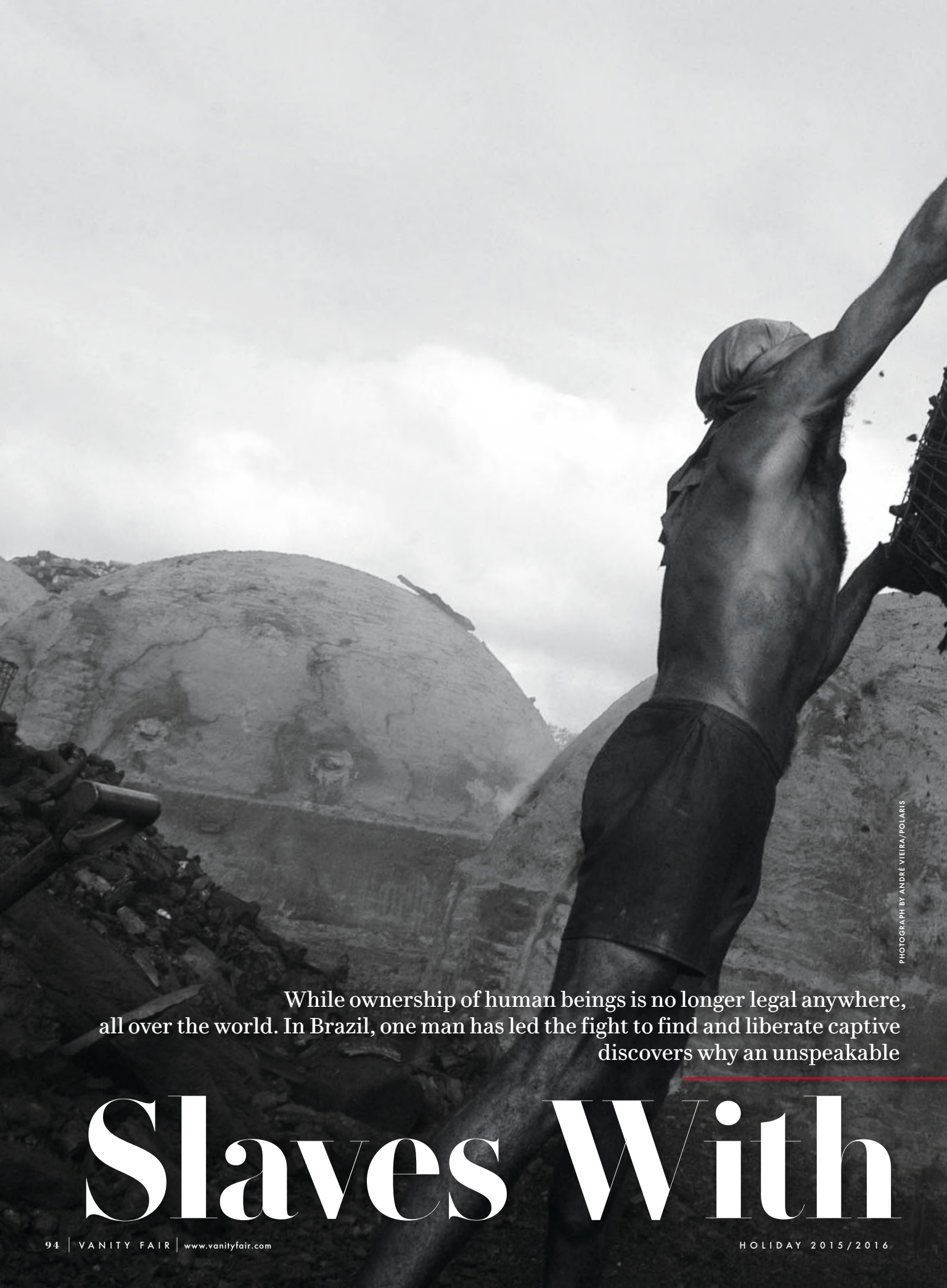
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Musical revues featuring the work of a single composer (Stephen Sondheim's *Putting It Together*) or choreographer (*Fosse,* about guess who) are Broadway favorites, but who would ever want to see a revue focused on the career of a producer-director? Oh, wait: there is a producer-director whose remarkable track record (21 Tony Awards!) over six decades would make for exhilarating theater. So, luckily for anyone who has ever grasped a *Playbill,* there is *Prince of Broadway,* celebrating Harold Prince, who—aside from perfecting the eyeglasses-perched-on-forehead look—has helped shape nearly three dozen musicals, including *West Side Story, Cabaret, Company, Follies, Evita,* and *The Phantom of the Opera.* Prince had no interest in simply taking songs from these shows and re-creating the staging, "partly because I cannot remember it and mostly because I wanted something fresh."

Aided by co-director and choreographer Susan Stroman, Prince has devised a show with the full backstage in view, so even when bits of scenery slip in from the wings or from above, "you always know you are in the theater." And in this case the theater is in Tokyo, where *Prince of Broadway* opened in late October for a limited run. Japan is a bit farther from Broadway than the classic tryout town of New Haven, but the show's producers still have Times Square in mind as its final destination.

You would think that that should be enough to keep any producer-director busy, but then you don't know this producer-director. In June, Prince will direct *The Band's Visit,* based on the 2007 film about an Egyptian police band's hapless but ultimately magical trip to an Israeli village. Prince and his wife saw the movie at their local cinema and loved it, so it was serendipitous when he was asked if he would like to work with composer David Yazbek (*The Full Monty*) on an adaptation for New York's Atlantic Theater. *The Band's Visit* will be musical number 35 for Prince, who is 87 years old. Does he have a favorite? He chuckles at the question and offers no answer, which shows he will go far in this business. □

HAL OF FAME
Hal Prince, photographed in the wings of the Majestic Theatre in New York City.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ VIEIRA/POLARIS

While ownership of human beings is no longer legal anywhere, all over the world. In Brazil, one man has led the fight to find and liberate captive discovers why an unspeakable

Slaves With



BONDAGE
Workers at a charcoal-producing facility in Maranhão, Brazil—a site raided by agents of the federal government's anti-slavery task force.

more than 20 million people are held in modern slavery
workers. Traveling deep into the Amazon, WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE
degradation is proving so hard to combat

out Chains

I. Captivity

Xavier Plassat is a friar of the Dominican order, a Frenchman who has worked for decades in the Brazilian Amazon and is renowned for his fight against slavery as it exists in our time. Modern slavery differs from classic chattel slavery, in which people are held as private property, but to the extent that it treats people as tools to be used and discarded, it is nearly as brutal and degrading. Currently it affects perhaps 20 million people, and probably many more. Relatively few are women tricked into prostitution; a greater number, men and women alike, are manual laborers in forests, fields, and factories, or at sea. It is possible to get caught up in the technicalities of definition. Those who rely on slaves for labor want as narrow a definition of "slavery" as possible. Brazil officially recognizes a broad definition, and for that reason it has made more progress against slavery than similar countries have. Still, in the Amazon alone tens of thousands of workers are enslaved at any given time.

Plassat is the man who generates the numbers, educates the press, warns the most vulnerable populations, pressures government agencies, and with the help of a sophisticated intelligence network transmits the locations of slaveholding operations to a specialized federal raiding force that over the past 20 years has rescued 50,000 slaves from captivity. Plassat is relentless. At 65 he is athletic and lithe. He has gray hair, a strikingly Gallic face, and piercing blue eyes. His demeanor and way of life are modest. Having taken vows of chastity and poverty, he lives in a humble house with two other friars in a village near the Araguaia River, where the Amazon forest has been cut down. The other two friars are priests. He is not. He is an employee of a Catholic organization called the Pastoral Land Commission, known in Portuguese by the abbreviation C.P.T., for which he coordinates a national campaign against slave labor. In his spare time he also wades into land disputes on the side of the poor. It is dangerous work in a place where law is thin. At least 12 of his colleagues and more than a thousand associated peasants have been murdered, rarely with legal consequence. Plassat's own life has been threatened. He remains philosophical and does not dwell on the risk to himself.

But he is not saintly. He grows impatient regularly, and quite often swears. He drinks and smokes, though in moderation. Recently I discovered that he has a taste for fast driving. It was the morning of our first full day together, in the state of Tocantins, with storm clouds building in the sky. Plassat sat behind the wheel of a Fiat sedan, speeding down dirt tracks that demanded greater caution, but he was running late for a meeting in a remote settlement and apparently glad for the excuse. He was not the man I had expected. I asked him if friars are like monks. He said, "Monks are more contemplative. They're not oriented toward action." I asked him if he believes in God and Christ. He said he does but could be wrong. What occupies him is not the promise of a distant heaven but the use of Christianity to help the poor fight for better lives. A journalist in São Paulo, who has known Plassat for years, later said to me, "Xavier, an agnostic? I think he believes in the waters and the trees. And he has been stronger than the liberation priests. They put God at the center of things. Xavier puts people at the center. The liberation priests are naïve about life sometimes. Xavier is not. He knows about joy as well as sorrow. He is not like the intentional martyrs, because he does not want to die. And the big farmers fear him all the more because he is rational."

THE ACTIVIST
Opposite: top, the Dominican friar Xavier Plassat, fighter against slavery, on the Araguaia River; *bottom,* deforestation continues, abetted by slave labor.

The problem he faces is that slavery fits naturally into the vast and brutal Brazilian countryside, with its feudal social order and masses of disenfranchised peasants. Slavery also is integral to the process of deforestation—the relentless conversion of jungle into ranches and commercial farms. South to north and east to west, the conversion has proceeded as a confusion of landgrabs—legal and illegal—along a shifting agricultural frontier that shoves aside the Indians and subsistence settlers and can be mapped even without satellite photos by plotting the highest concentrations of slave-labor cases.

The landowners protest that they are performing a patriotic service by turning jungle into productive land, and that the workers they employ are accustomed to hard lives and grateful for the jobs. These arguments resonate widely. And it is true that, in Brazil, a fine line exists between ordinary working conditions and those that constitute slavery. It is a case study of how the unacceptable can turn into a norm. People in the Northeast of Brazil, where many slaves come from, have long used the word "captive" as a general description of their fate. But modern slavery is something more severe.

II. The Bondage Industry

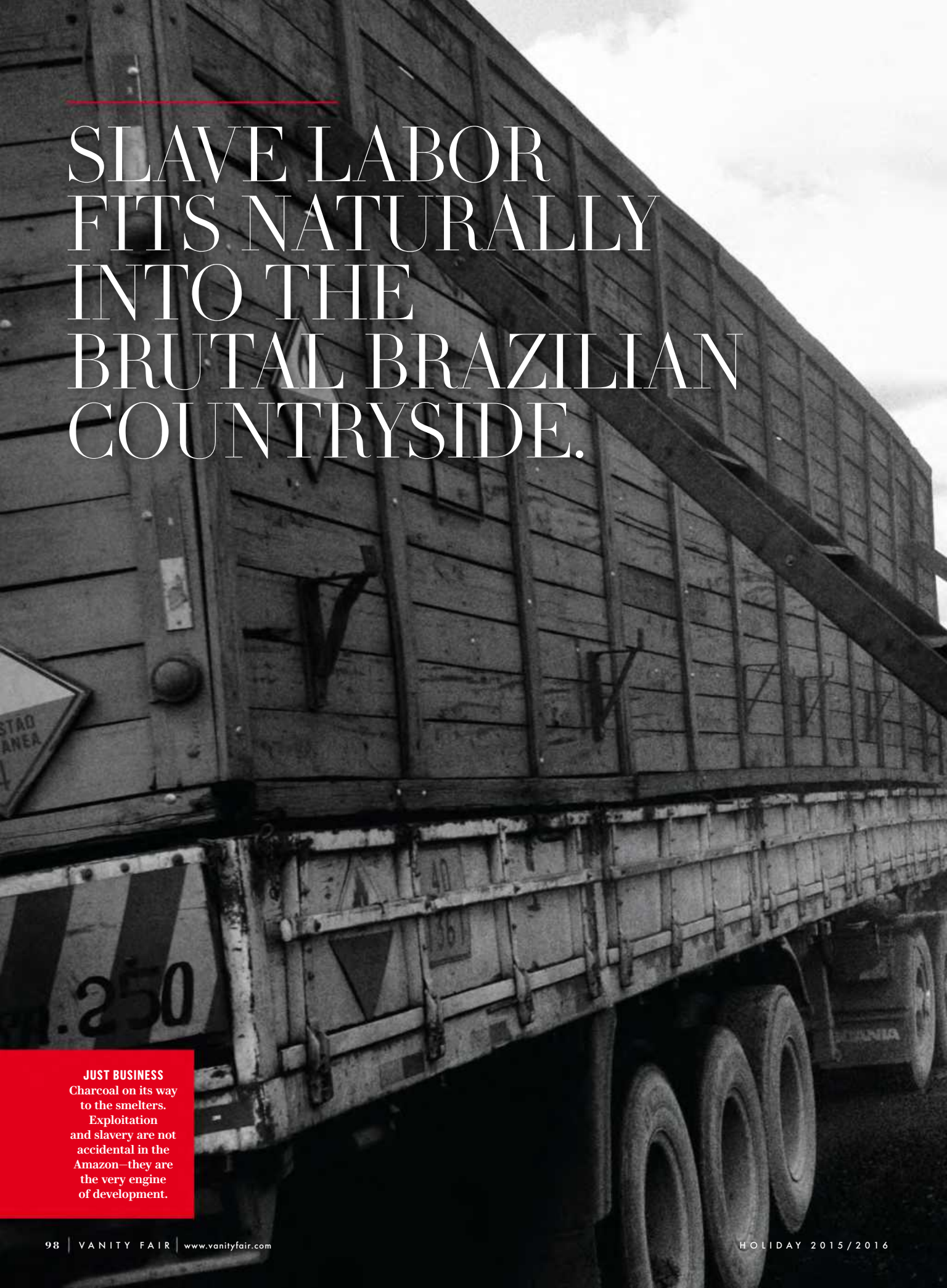
Chattel slavery, the ownership of people, is illegal everywhere except apparently in the territories held by the Islamic State, where there have been reports of public slave markets. The final country to outlaw it was Mauritania, in 1981. Nonetheless, in Mauritania chattel slavery remains common. It also lingers in a swath across the Sahara and Sahel, in Mali, Niger, Algeria, Chad, and Sudan. Altogether there are perhaps a million chattel slaves in the world today. Of the 21 million people whom the International Labour Organization estimates are subjected to slave labor, that leaves 20 million slaves of the modern kind to account for. The I.L.O. estimates are conservative. Other estimates range as high as 38 million.

Modern slaves are forced laborers. They are held in captivity of one form or another and made to work for the benefit of others. They may or may not have been trafficked. Their condition may be temporary, but it can also be fatal. They inhabit a parallel world, sometimes in plain sight. A slave may look like a skeleton tethered to a tree in the Amazon or like a nanny in a playground in Paris—the full range exists. According to the I.L.O., 10 percent of the victims are held by states and military forces, 22 percent are sex workers, and the rest, 68 percent, are involved in other forms of economic activity—primarily in agriculture, manufacturing, mining, construction, and domestic work. The 68 percent is the subject here. Nearly half of these slaves are women, and a very large number are children. The U.S. Department of Labor has listed some

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP, BY WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE; BOTTOM, BY KAY CHERNUSH/FREE THE SLAVES


20
CPT

SLAVE LABOR FITS NATURALLY INTO THE BRUTAL BRAZILIAN COUNTRYSIDE.



JUST BUSINESS Charcoal on its way to the smelters. Exploitation and slavery are not accidental in the Amazon—they are the very engine of development.



PHOTOGRAPH BY KADIR VAN LOHUIZEN/NOOR/REDUX

of the products associated with their captivity: diamonds from Angola; clothing from Argentina; dried fish from Bangladesh; cotton from Benin; cattle, corn, peanuts, Brazil nuts, and sugarcane from Bolivia; bamboo, beans, bricks, jade, palm thatch, physic nuts, rice, rubber, rubies, sesame, shrimp, sugarcane, sunflowers, and teak from Burma; artificial flowers, bricks, Christmas decorations, coal, cotton, electronics, fireworks, footwear, clothing, nails, and toys from China. The list goes on, 37 countries in all, omitting countries such as those of the Arabian Peninsula, where slaves do not produce goods and are held primarily for construction and domestic chores. The prevalence of slavery is lowest in places with developed economies and a rigorous rule of law, but if isolated cases are included, slavery exists in every country, including the United States. Last spring, a wealthy couple in Los Angeles was indicted for trafficking three Indonesian women who alleged they had been lured to America and held as household slaves. (The couple has pleaded not guilty.) In the American South, prosecutors have won convictions against farm-labor contractors who kept hundreds of workers in physical confinement, under threat of beatings and death. The bulk of the problem, however, lies in places with desperate populations and limited social contracts, where corruption weakens the law and the exploitation of an underclass is accepted as normal.

In Thailand, the existence of systemic slavery on fishing boats and in seafood-processing plants has been extensively documented by several investigations, including an exceptional effort by *The Guardian.* The slaves come primarily from Laos, Burma, and Cambodia. They are smuggled into the country and sold directly into captivity on the boats, some of which remain at sea for years to keep anyone from escaping. Conditions on board are abysmal, and include beatings and summary executions. In a survey titled *Human Trafficking Around the World,* the researchers Stephanie Hepburn and Rita J. Simon note that 37 percent of all shrimp imported to the United States come from Thailand, and they quote a former State Department official as saying, "It's essential that people know with absolute certainty that the flow of shrimp into the U.S. market is tainted by shrimp that's processed by the hands of those in slavery."

Russia is another hot spot. The number of slaves there is uncertain, but outside of the sex trade it may amount to 500,000, giving Russia one of the largest slave populations in the world. The phenomenon is based not on the country's old habit of state slavery but on the greed, cynicism, and criminality that have characterized Russian society for the past 25 years. The victims are primarily foreigners, lured by middlemen. Once they arrive, their documents are confiscated and they are put to work in construction, textile manufacturing, ship repair, quarries, and farming. It has been widely reported that forced laborers were engaged in the preparations for the 2014 Winter Olympics, in Sochi.

Systemic slavery? Haiti has a big problem with it, as do Peru, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Namibia, Botswana, Nigeria, Uzbekistan, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, and Cambodia. And all of these pale compared with India. By conservative estimate, India has perhaps eight million slaves. They work in domestic servitude; carpets, leather, and clothing; the production of cottonseed and rice; the excavation of stone; and embroidery. These are locals, not immigrants. The problem is uniquely Indian, closely related to the caste mentality, and concentrated among the outcast populations now generally known as Dalits. The slavery usually takes the form of bonded servitude in which victims are obligated to provide their labor—whether for a few years or for life—because of a debt that someone in their family has incurred. The debt may have been incurred by ancestors and passed down; more commonly it was incurred by desperate parents who then sell their children into fixed terms of obligation.

All of which is to say that Brazil is not alone. But it stands out as a leader in taking vigorous action, backed by innovative legal instruments, and Xavier Plassat, though he would deny it, is perhaps the main reason why.

III. Brother Tito

Brazil was built by chattel slaves, including four million imported from Africa and untold numbers of native Indians. It was the last country in the Western Hemisphere to abolish the ownership of people, which it did in 1888: "From the date of this law slavery is declared extinct in Brazil." Realities were not so simple. Especially in the rural Northeast, where land was concentrated in very few hands, masses of subjugated peasants lived locked into servitude. After three centuries of slavery, the arrangement seemed normal to rich and poor alike. And time was slow in that part of the world. Dust rose from the sunbaked earth, and to the west, in the aboriginal forest, the rivers flowed eternally. The First World War came and went without local commotion. In 1926, out beyond the horizon, the League of Nations came up with the first anti-slavery convention, an agreement to disapprove of chattel slavery. In the Amazon, life continued as before. Four years later, in 1930, the International Labour Organization generated a convention that disapproved of forced labor. Amazonia failed to notice. But that same year, out in the ether, a butterfly flapped its wings: an international commission of inquiry into slavery in Liberia expanded the definition of "slave" from a person who is owned by another to a person working under conditions "analogous" to the same thing.

Xavier Plassat was minus 20 years old. The redefinition had no immediate consequences. In 1940, when Plassat was minus 10, Brazil instituted a penal code that adopted the new language and outlawed "reducing anyone to a condition analogous to that of a slave" but did not define what such a condition was. Nothing changed. Governments rose and fell. In 1950, Plassat was born in faraway France. Over the following decade, in Brazil's Northeast, the peasants formed leagues in alliance with the Communist Party and began to agitate for the expropriation and re-distribution of the large estates. It was a subversive aspiration that panicked the powerful and helped lead to a coup in 1964. Out of fear of Communism, the coup was supported by the Catholic Church and the United States. A retrograde military regime used torture and censorship to dominate Brazil for the next two decades.

One of the regime's first initiatives was to conquer the Amazon by penetrating it with roads and encouraging permanent settlement. The effort was couched in military terms as "Operation Amazonia," and was presented as a matter of national security. There was a sense then, as there is now, that without a strong Brazilian presence greedy foreign forces might invade the land. The regime believed that the program would stimulate the economy by making room for large cattle operations, and also that it would relieve the pressure for agrarian reform by doling out small parcels of unwanted jungle to peasants. But fewer poor settlers than expected arrived, and having hacked their parcels from the jungle, many of them failed and became laborers to survive. Large corporations and the rich began to clear the forests wholesale, deploying gunmen to remove anyone who got in their way. There was no law. There was no order.

Exploitation of the poor formed the very foundation of the Amazon's development. By 1970, this was clear. After years in Africa, a Spanish priest named Pedro Casaldáliga had moved to the remote river town of São Félix do Araguaia, on the agricultural frontier in the state of Mato Grosso, and had been shocked by the oppression he observed. More than a decade later, in an interview with the journalist Jan Rocha, he said, "In our first week in São Félix, four children died

and were carried past our house down to the cemetery in cardboard boxes which looked like shoe boxes. We were to bury so many children there—each family loses three or four dead infants—and so many adults, dead or killed, many without even a coffin, and some without even a name." The local Indians were being removed from their territory, and wretched conditions prevailed on the big new cattle ranches. All this was happening in obscurity, with no mention in the press and only silence from the Church. Casaldáliga wrote a pastoral letter in which he denounced the horrors and, borrowing from the penal code, applied the term "conditions analogous to slavery." Here's the definition you ignored, Casaldáliga was saying. The military regime responded by banning the letter, but copies of it got around.

Plassat knew nothing of this at the time. He was an activist Catholic and student in Paris at the elite Sciences Po, where he was concentrating on economics, management, and finance in order to apply that knowledge to leftist causes. Two years earlier he had been on the streets confronting the police during the quasi-revolution of May '68. Now he was too busy studying to worry about slavery, let alone the Amazon.

As it turned out, the event that would ultimately draw him to Brazil had already occurred. It was the 1969 arrest in São Paulo of a young Dominican friar named Tito de Alencar Lima, known as Frei Tito. He was suspected of having ties to left-wing guerrillas and was severely and repeatedly tortured by the notorious Department of Political and Social Order, under the direction of a baby-faced sadist named Sérgio Fleury. The torture sessions broke Frei Tito, who managed nonetheless to smuggle out a note describing the procedures. In one case, he wrote, a torturer had come into his cell dressed in religious garb, saying, "You're a dirty homosexual priest. We'll give you Communion. Open your mouth." He inserted wires and began to deliver electric shocks.

Frei Tito's smuggled note caused a scandal. In 1971 he was deported to Chile, and from there he fled to Rome and then to Paris, where the Dominicans gave him shelter. But he was in a state of permanent anxiety and paranoia. He saw Fleury everywhere. In 1973 the Dominicans moved him to a peaceful priory above a small valley near Lyon, where a smart and idealistic young friar took him on and became his friend.

IV. The Red Bishop

That friar was Xavier Plassat. He had graduated from Sciences Po, earned another degree, in Third World development, and joined the Dominican order as a means of committing to social action. He was fascinated by Frei Tito, who in his lucid moments had much to say about theology and conditions in Brazil. But Tito was continuing to unravel. Repeatedly he disappeared, and Plassat had to go searching for him through the streets of Lyon and the surrounding countryside. One afternoon, Plassat returned from a trip and found him sitting under a tree at the priory, trembling, crying, and babbling incoherently. The other friars said he had been there all day, refusing to come inside or to eat or drink. Plassat sat with him for hours. Eventually he understood that in Tito's mind the sadistic Fleury had arrived in a village that lay across the valley, and from there he was giving Tito orders, forbidding him from entering the priory and threatening to torture his family. Plassat tried to dispel the fantasy, but to no avail. Finally Plassat addressed Fleury directly, saying, "But, Mr. Fleury, surely you don't object if Tito has a coffee?" Fleury reluctantly agreed. Plassat laced a coffee with Valium and gave it to Tito. The Valium had little effect. It started to rain and the sun went down. They stayed together under the tree all night. In the morning Plassat got Tito to a psychiatric hospital. In the waiting room Tito stood with his back to the wall, his arms outstretched. A nurse asked him what he was CONTINUED ON PAGE 144

POINT RETAKEN



Édgar Ramírez, Teresa Palmer, and Luke Bracey, photographed on Dockweiler State Beach, in Playa del Rey, California.

RAMÍREZ WEARS A SHIRT BY ALEXANDER OLCH; SHORTS BY BURBERRY. PALMER WEARS A TANK DRESS BY THE ELDER STATESMAN; BIKINI BY MICHAEL KORS COLLECTION. BRACEY WEARS A SUIT BY PRADA.

"It was a really intensely scary experience," says actress Teresa Palmer of filming a long underwater sequence for *Point Break,* a remake of the seminal 1991 surf-and-skydive heist movie, opening on Christmas Day. "I'm totally scared of the water. I'm the polar opposite of most Aussies I know. But I had to film a sequence where Luke [Bracey] and I were under the water for hours and hours at a time. I certainly had to face my fears." That kind of daring seems to be the guiding principle behind director Ericson Core's reimagining, which, in featuring a variety of extreme sports—including big-wave surfing, mountain climbing, and wing-suit gliding—places a premium on on-location shots and practical stunts. "Everything we did was authentic," says Core. "We've done essentially no greenscreen, C.G.I. work at all." Capturing that kind of realism meant traveling to many far-flung locales, from massive swells off the coast of Tahiti to Venezuela's vertiginous Angel Falls to the stormy peak of Mont Blanc. Filming in those treacherous, hard-to-reach places "makes [acting] easier because you don't have to imagine anything," says Édgar Ramírez, who plays criminal-mastermind surfer-philosopher Bodhi, a part made famous by the late, great Patrick Swayze. Staging all these intense, physical scenes meant a lot for the actors personally too. "It was a lifetime's worth of experience in six months," says Bracey, who takes over for Keanu Reeves as undercover F.B.I. agent Johnny Utah. "Hanging about 3,000 feet above the earth off Angel Falls was something I'll never forget. I don't think my heart's raced that fast, ever. And I don't know that it ever will." —RICHARD LAWSON

PHOTOGRAPH BY PEGGY SIROTA

STYLED BY NAOMI DELUCE WILDING; HAIR PRODUCTS BY ORIBE (BRACEY, RAMÍREZ) AND TRESEMMÉ (PALMER); MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY DIOR; GROOMING PRODUCTS BY TOM FORD; HAIR BY JOHN D. (PALMER); MAKEUP BY JEANNIA ROBINETTE; GROOMING BY SUSSY CAMPOS; MANICURE BY CHELSEA KING; SET DESIGN BY PHILLIP WILLIAMS; PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY STEVE BAUERFEIND; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

It Boy

ENFANT FORMIDABLE

As Xavier Dolan wraps his sixth film, the 26-year-old director says it all began with *Titanic*

The French-Canadian wunderkind filmmaker Xavier Dolan thinks the reason he's so bad at interviews is that he likes them so much. "I love confiding my worries, opinions, states of mind—everything." *The New York Times* called him "an erratic conversationalist." In addition to being a talker, he's a gifted storyteller. His first movie, *I Killed My Mother,* which was based on an essay he wrote in high school about a complicated mother-son relationship, premiered to a standing ovation at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009. In 2014, his fifth feature, *Mommy,* about an overwhelmed widow trying to navigate life with a violent son, shared the Jury Prize, at the same festival, with Jean-Luc Godard's *Goodbye to Language.* (Dolan is well received on the French Riviera. He's been invited to Cannes five times and has served on the jury—at 26 years old!)

Dolan was raised in Montmagny, a modest town on the shores of the St. Lawrence River near Quebec. At four, he became a child actor—working in commercials and in small roles for TV. He had an unconventional upbringing because he was so often on set, surrounded by adults. "Incidentally, the company of children began to feel odd, and I, myself, became odd." He made friends, instead, at his day job. "I befriended crew guys who talked about their sexual lives, forgetting I was eight, and taught me how to curse and burp and spit."

When he was eight, he had a life-changing moment. His mother took him to see the 1997 blockbuster *Titanic.* As he watched Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet go down with the ship, he remembers, "I never fathomed things could be so opulently produced. [That] ambition and scale were extraterrestrial to me. It taught me the size of my dreams could be unlimited." He watched the movie more than 100 times. And he learned English "so I could one day act with DiCaprio, with whom I became maniacally obsessed. *Titanic* was the impetus to all passions."

Dolan has just finished shooting his sixth film, *It's Only the End of the World,* which is based on Jean-Luc Lagarce's play about a writer who comes home to tell his family he's dying. It stars Marion Cotillard, Léa Seydoux, and Vincent Cassel. He doesn't mince words when describing his leading lady: "Marion is a princess of milk and silk with eyes chiseled of diamonds and emeralds. I'd ask her to be the mother of my children, but her husband [is] the most gorgeous man alive."

Dolan is also the director behind the record-breaking music-video debut (with more than 27 million views in 24 hours) for Adele's new song, "Hello." And in his downtime he dubs the voices of many leading actors of his generation, including Taylor Lautner, Nicholas Hoult, and Eddie Redmayne, for French cinema. "I bump into them now and make them listen to their French voice; it freaks them out." —DEREK BLASBERG

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For behind-the-scenes photos from **ADELE'S** music video directed by Dolan, go to VF.COM/HOLIDAY2015/2016.

STYLED BY SCIASCIA GAMBACCINI; HAIR PRODUCTS BY KEVIN MURPHY; MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY LE SOURCIL; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY ANGÉLIK IFFENNECKER. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

PHOTOGRAPH BY WAYNE MASER

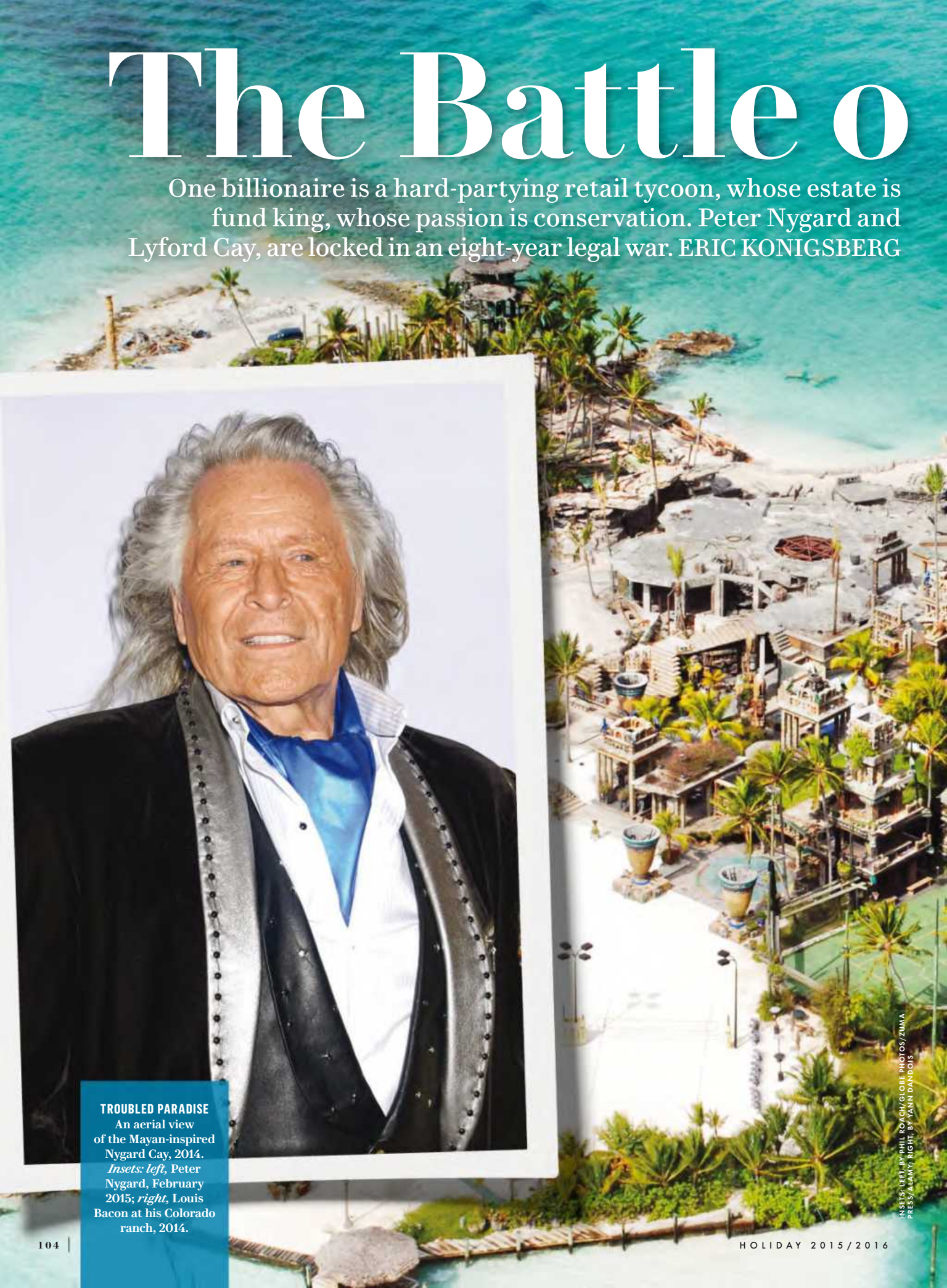


Xavier Dolan, photographed on the roof of the Hôtel Regina, in Paris.

DOLAN WEARS CLOTHING AND A SCARF BY LOUIS VUITTON.

The Battle o

One billionaire is a hard-partying retail tycoon, whose estate is fund king, whose passion is conservation. Peter Nygard and Lyford Cay, are locked in an eight-year legal war. ERIC KONIGSBERG

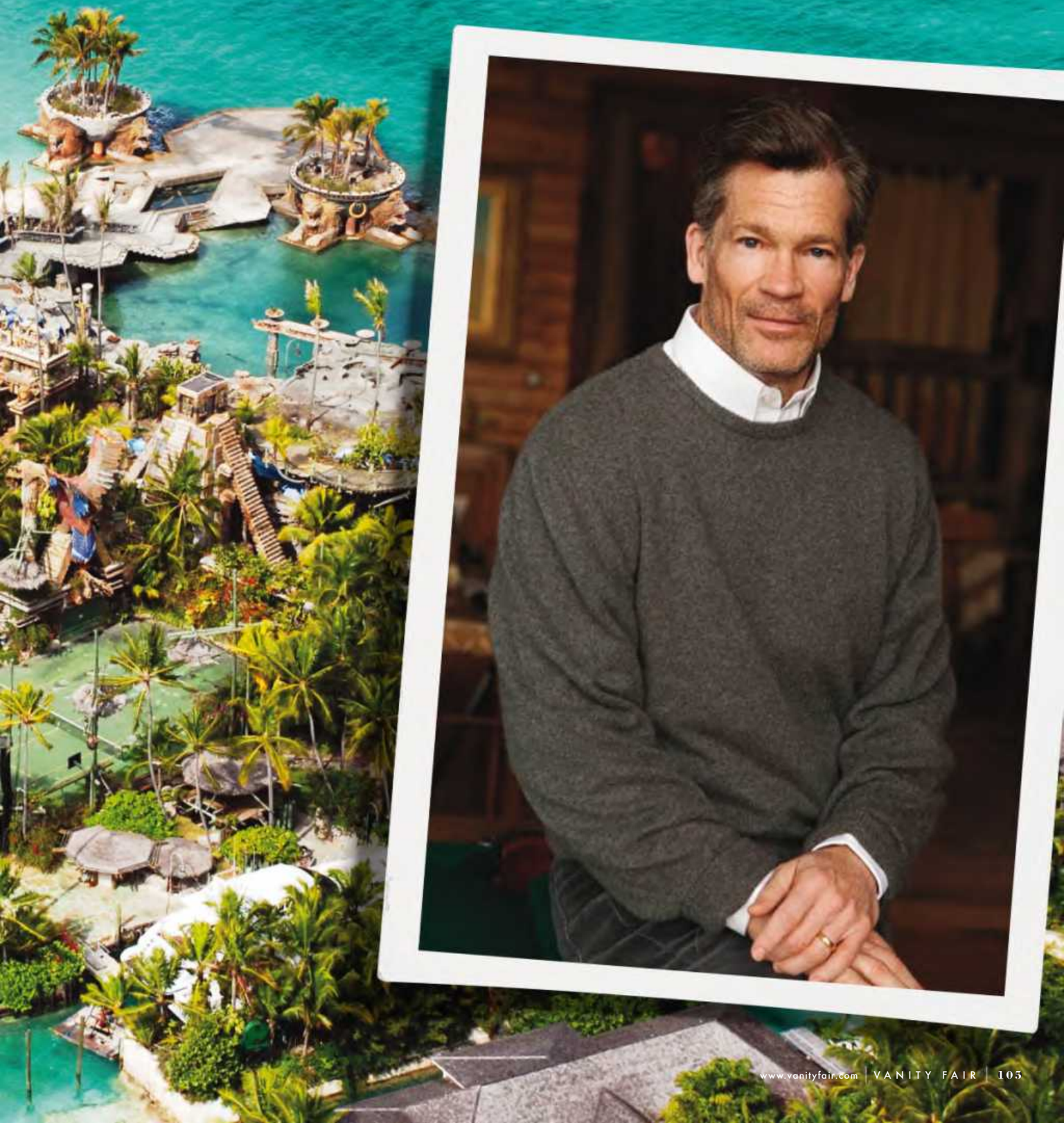


TROUBLED PARADISE An aerial view of the Mayan-inspired Nygard Cay, 2014. *Insets: left,* Peter Nygard, February 2015; *right,* Louis Bacon at his Colorado ranch, 2014.

INSETS: LEFT, BY PHIL ROACH/GLOBE PHOTOS/ZUMA PRESS/ALAMY; RIGHT, BY YANN DANDOIS

f Lyford Cay

fit for a Mayan emperor. The other is a buttoned-up hedge-
Louis Bacon, neighbors in the gated Bahamian community of
reports on the epic clash that has turned each man's paradise into hell



The whole thing began over a puddle in a driveway.

The two men are next-door neighbors in Lyford Cay, a gated community on New Providence, an island in the Bahamas, and for years it had been a peaceful adjacency. Because both of them happen to be billionaires, it is a picturesque driveway, lined by casuarina trees and triple Alexander palms, 200 feet north of a stunning body of water known as Clifton Bay and 100 feet south of an even more stunning vista upon the Atlantic Ocean.

It is less a driveway than a road—but also a portion of road that is shared by both neighbors and nobody else, owing to how it cuts right through one man's property and ends at the other man's, which occupies the westernmost tip of the island. And we're talking about a land of eight-figure beachfront properties, where the houses are very close to each other—where one man's dining room is only about 200 feet from the other's revolving acrylic discotheque floor and the glass walls that enclose it with a steady cascade of water.

An "easement" is what the driveway's creator, the developer E. P. Taylor, a Canadian brewing tycoon, termed this shared passage when he established Lyford Cay in 1955. (The road itself he saw fit to name E. P. Taylor Drive.) But just as one man's driveway is another man's easement, one neighbor's cocktail party is another's sleepless night due to the fact that there are 2,000 Bahamians—plus a lot of young women from islands throughout the Atlantic, not to mention Europe—whooping it up at the topless bacchanal next door. And one man's overflow of parked cars along the driveway on that sleepless neighbor's side of the property line is another man's reason to have the section of the driveway that cuts through his property re-graded and rebuilt, adding a dip and tall flagstone walls on either side, leaving no shoulder space for anybody to ever conceivably think of parking there, while also screening the driveway from view.

The dip created a drainage problem when it rained: the puddling. "It was smelly. And it had mosquitoes. And in order to come to our place you had to go and wear rubber boots to come and knock on our door," says Peter Nygard, a Canadian manufacturer of women's wear and the neighbor at the end of the road who threw the parties. In a court filing, he referred to it as "a toilet drain."

"Nygard likes the idea that people think they're going to a separate island when they go to his place," says Louis Bacon, a titan of New York finance and the neighbor who constructed the strategic no-parking zone. "Now it kind of looks like what the English call a ha-ha: the road drops and it feels more private. It's a better entrance for his guests and better for me too."

But that was then, and this is now. And somehow, what began in 2007 with a bit of irritation over runoff has escalated to a battle royal encompassing no fewer than 16 legal actions between Nygard and Bacon and their associates, in which both sides are claiming damages in the tens of millions of dollars and lobbing allegations of activities that include vandalism, bribery, insider trading, arson, murder, destruction of the fragile seabed, and having a close association with the Ku Klux Klan.

It has reached a point where neither man, though each used to consider Lyford Cay his rightful home, spends much time there anymore. Nygard, unable to obtain government permits to rebuild his six-acre, Mayan-inspired compound after an electrical fire in 2009 demolished most of the structures—including the 32,000-square-foot "grand hall," with its 100,000-pound glass ceiling—has been left to live out of his study when he does visit, and has stopped throwing parties altogether. He blames the man next door for all of it, citing a string of environmental-degradation suits that Bacon has filed against him in court.

Bacon hasn't set foot in the Bahamas in more than a year, claiming it would put his personal safety at risk. In January 2015, he leveled a $100 million defamation complaint against Nygard in New York, where both men's businesses are headquartered. Nygard, the suit alleges, has been the "ringleader" behind a vast multi-media smear campaign—TV and radio ads purchased, Web sites created, videos doctored, T-shirts printed, and even "hate rallies" staged with parades through Nassau—all in the name of labeling Bacon a racist, a thief, and a "terrorist," and bearing messages such as BACON GO HOME.

Nygard filed a counterclaim and tells anybody who will listen that Bacon is trying to destroy him out of a simple desire to take over his property, claiming that some years ago—Nygard can't recall when—a real-estate agent came to his house on Bacon's behalf and offered $100 million for the place. When he turned him down, the agent replied that Bacon would get the property "one way or another," Nygard claims, adding that he doesn't know the man's name and can't remember where he worked, "because it was such a joke to me." Even so, he says, he took it as a threat. (Bacon has said he made no such offer and was never interested in acquiring Nygard's land.)

Nygard vows he will never sell and says that he has never met anybody "that smart, that competitive, in my life. He reminds me of Hitler."

"Peter Pinocchio," Bacon calls Nygard in an open letter he published in the Bahamas *Tribune,* noting his habit of "playing footsie with the truth."

And so on.

In This Corner

At 74, with his long white hair and vigorously spread family tree (he has had eight children with five women), Nygard is something like the Hugh Hefner of downmarket retail. Aesthetically—shirt unbuttoned to the navel, tight black jeans, and some sort of glitter he applies to his suntanned arms after showering—he brings to mind a mash-up of Sam Walton and Gunther Gebel-Williams, the circus-animal trainer.

Some things you should know about Nygard: His personal history involves emigrating from Finland to Mani-





PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, BY AMANDA GORDON/BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; JONATHAN BECKER, COURTESY OF SAVE THE BAYS; © WENN LTD./ALAMY; COURTESY OF VLADI PRIVATE ISLANDS



Bacon and his wife, Gabrielle, at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2014.



Nygard and one of the outsize lion heads at Nygard Cay, 2015.



An aerial view of the western tip of New Providence, 2014.



The pool and gazebo at Nygard's six-acre estate.



SueLyn Medeiros and Nygard at Bahamas Fashion Week, in Nassau, 2008.

toba with his family when he was eight and living out of a converted coalbin. At 24 he purchased a share in a clothing-manufacturing company with an $8,000 loan, and before long renamed it Nygard. Today, it has about a dozen lines of inexpensive apparel, aimed mostly at middle-aged shoppers and available in more than 200 Nygard stores and other retail chains in North America, and does $500 million in annual sales. He dated Anna Nicole Smith for several years.

He is famous in the Bahamas. He flies there in a private jet that bears the words PETER NYGARD N FORCE and once reportedly had a stripper's pole inside. He sued a former associate for claiming that Nygard had "deliberately hired celebrity lookalikes" to attend his Oscar party, according to the lawsuit. The case was eventually settled. He is obsessed with longevity. He was giving himself testosterone shots every other day and made arrangements with a lab to receive regular injections of his own stem cells. He talks about the virtues of exercise and healthy eating, and he takes about 50 pills a day—"vitamins, supplements, pharmaceuticals," he says. "What is it that I'm working on? Getting younger."

More than anything, Nygard is proud of his concrete sanctuary, which in 1992 he persuaded the Bahamian government to rename Nygard Cay to coincide with a *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous* segment. For the preceding 400 years it had been known as Simms Point. Nygard designed and constructed the compound himself over more than two decades. ("To give Nygard credit, he's industrious," Bacon concedes. "I used to see him out there in his front loader.") Even with the main house at Nygard Cay mostly in ruins six years after the fire—the grand staircase that ran through it is now more of an open-air gangway—there's still plenty to marvel at: carved dragons, 60-foot ziggurats with hundreds of torches lit individually every night by his staff, giant statues of nude women modeled on his former girlfriends, and what he claims is the world's largest sauna, a 6,000-square-foot A-frame lodge constructed of Canadian-pine logs that are 2 feet thick and 28 feet long. "We went and got a special barge, huge undertaking," he says of importing them, adding that it was the first building he erected. "Every Finn starts with the saunas."

Nygard and his friends sometimes refer to his estate as "Disneyland on steroids." Chichén Ibiza is more like it. A squadron of peacocks strut on the grounds. Giant urns belch smoke like volcanoes. Coiled stone cobras hiss steam at sunset. The multi-hued structures are festooned with thousands of colored lightbulbs.

He's struggling to get approval to rebuild from the Bahamian government but may want the next iteration to resemble a spaceship. "I'm into a lot of other kind of design, the New York design—it's more techy," he says. He won't think of trying to replicate what he already built. "You know that song, 'Someone left the cake out in the rain'? I lost that recipe. 'I'll never have that recipe again.'" He's got no idea how much money he put into it the first time.

Nygard misses the life he had in Lyford before Bacon—whom he refers to as "my nice neighbor"—began to get in the way. He no longer holds his Sunday-night "pamper parties," which offered everybody free spa treatments. "It just tore a heart out of me," Nygard says. "This was my dream, my life wrapped up in here." But tonight he's still having fun. In his mirrored gym, which now functions as the dining room, he eats dinner and downs the contents of a meticulously marked Baggie full of pills handed to him by a young personal assistant. He mentions that his assistant is "one of my main girlfriends."

Soon, they're joined by a couple of other women, who have just arrived from Miami, and several members of the Bahamian men's volleyball team. They all consider driving to town for the parade celebrating Junkanoo, a national holiday. "You have to take off your top if we go," he jokes with one of the ladies, flipping his hands upward from his shoulders to pantomime. Instead, everybody stays up until three A.M. playing poker.

On his TV is a frozen picture of Bacon bearing the words "5 Lies of Bacon." Outside, on his volleyball court, one of several large signs reads, ITS [*sic*] TIME TO THROW THE TRASH OUT! LOUIS KKK BACON. The signs (which Nygard says have since been taken down) are pointed out toward the water, in case anybody sailing by in Clifton Bay should want to know more about the man. Bacon's hedge fund is name-checked, too: MOORE CAPITAL MANAGEMENT. On another is Bacon's face with the word CRIMINAL stamped over his forehead. The signs are easily seen from the Bacon family's breakfast nook.

In That Corner

In a glass-tower office, framed by views of the Manhattan skyline and the Hudson River, Bacon, 59 years old and sitting tall in a chrome-and-leather chair, is surrounded by trading screens, clocks set to the times of various overseas markets, squash and yachting magazines, model aircraft. "Dealing with Nygard," he says, "is like having dog shit on your shoe." (Nygard's riposte: "I recommend that he change his shoes.")

He is short on dialogue: he has little to say that his lawyers can't say for him, because he's doing his best to appear aloof, as if to assert that the feud has failed to get the better of him. He's also mortified to have his public identity joined with his antagonist's. "Louis doesn't like attention in the first place," says his college friend and Lyford neighbor, Chris Brady. "But it's almost criminal for him to even be mentioned in the same paragraph as Peter Nygard."

Bacon grew up in a wealthy real-estate-business family in North Carolina, boarded at Episcopal High School, in Alexandria, Virginia, and graduated from Middlebury College (where he is now a trustee) and Columbia Business School. He's a member of the Racquet and Tennis Club and the Union Club of the City of New York. He has seven children, four with his first wife and three with his current wife. The hedge fund he owns and runs has some $15 billion under management, and his estimated net worth is $1.75 billion. *Forbes* once summed up his investment strategy as "secretive, risk-conscious, a bit paranoid." If, on a lark, he were persuaded to read for a movie part calling for a "handsome Wall Street kingpin type," he'd probably be turned down because the fit seems too perfect to be credible: sculpted mandible, enviably tousled locks.

Where Nygard has made a visible mark on the cay with his estate, Bacon wants his country houses known for how meticulously they fit into their surroundings. He has a lot of them. In addition to his residence on the Upper East Side, he owns a weekend home on Robins Island, off the coast of Southampton, Long Island, where he hosts polo matches and driven-pheasant shoots. (He bought the entire 445-acre island in 1993 for $11 million.) He also owns a grouse moor in Scotland and a hunting lodge in the North of England. Then there was his Georgian town house in Knightsbridge (before he sold it), not to mention spreads he still owns in Panama, New Mexico, and North Carolina, as well as his 172,000-acre Colorado ranch, which, when he purchased it from Malcolm Forbes's family for $175 million, in 2007, became the most expensive American residence ever. A second estate in Lyford Cay—for spillover guests or staff—has an indoor squash court.

"The common denominator is his engagement in natural resources,

an astute sensitivity to all the components that make a habitat conducive to the area in question," says Peter Talty, an architect who works for Bacon's own personal property-management company. ("Trust me, it's a full-time job.") Bacon is fond of the judicious (and tax-deductible) gambit known as a conservation easement, deploying it, for example, to restore the eastern-mud-turtle population and preserve the habitat of endangered shorebirds on Robins Island.

Since 1994, he has contributed $175 million to conservationist causes, including funds to prevent Clifton Bay, a coral-lined stretch abutting Lyford Cay, from being developed as a subdivision anchored by a casino. That it has since been preserved as a national park was what, in 2013, won him the Audubon Society's annual medal for contributions to conservation. He is "the rare wealthy businessman who sees the environment as a battleground," says Robert F. Kennedy Jr., of the Waterkeeper Alliance lobbying group, a favorite charity of Bacon's. "Louis funded our litigation against the factory-farm industry while he was constantly running into the head of Smithfield in his elevator, because they lived in the same building on Park Avenue," Kennedy says. "That's kind of funny when you think about it, particularly since his name is Bacon."

As for his place in Lyford, Point House, you might never guess that the owner is this rich. Even though there's a custom-made board game called "Baconopoly" sitting on a credenza, with squares named for all of Bacon's properties (Rutland Gate, Coral House), their identities turn out to have been affixed via printed stickers, a utilitarian gift. "In this world, you don't disclose a lot," says Ian Levy, who, with his wife, Charlotte, manages the household staff of seven (more when the Bacons are there). "As a former yacht captain, if I am sailing and my owner decides to cross with another boat, the other captain and I won't even refer to our boats' owners by name. It's simply 'your owner' and 'my owner.'" Even so, he does acknowledge that "a sitting queen and a former king" have been guests of the Bacons'. (The queen was Noor of Jordan.) Even the Levys' uniforms are low-key: matching polo shirts with the Point House logo, a simple child's drawing of a cottage.

The Levys have witnessed the feud up close and speak about their neighbor with contempt. But Bacon, they insist, has never lost his cool. "His response isn't emotional," Ian Levy says. "This is not a man you just phone up to tell him that a leaf's fallen off a tree. I would tell him what happened, and he said, 'Take photographs and refer it to the legal department.' He responds to Peter Nygard as a problem that needs to be taken care of."

Until he filed his defamation suit, this year, Bacon fought Nygard mostly under the auspices of an environmental campaign, joined by many Lyford residents, that sought to rectify changes to the coastline they claim Nygard is responsible for. In 2014, 103 locals put their names on a complaint against the Bahamian government, demanding that certain procedures be followed in order for Nygard to get legal clearance to rebuild. Some people in Lyford CONTINUED ON PAGE 142

ARONSON-RATH'S HAIR BY DIANE WEGGE

ON THE *FRONTLINE*



David Fanning and Raney Aronson-Rath, photographed in the *Frontline* editing room, at WGBH, in Boston.

Some people make films and some people make films happen. While David Fanning started out as a filmmaker, his great skill has been to make films happen. From 1983 through this May, as the executive producer of the PBS series *Frontline,* he engineered the making of more than 600 films. It's not just the quantity that's impressive; it's the quality: 69 Emmys, 17 Peabody Awards, and 31 duPont–Columbia University Awards, including three rarely awarded Gold Batons.

Over time, Fanning has left a contradictory legacy. On the one hand, he has practiced a dispassionate, transparent TV journalism in which complete interviews and primary documents are posted online. On the other, he was never hands-off. Unlike ESPN's *30-for-30,* where disparate styles are encouraged, Fanning has steered many *Frontline* pieces into a house brand so distinctive that the omniscient narrator's role (almost always played by Will Lyman) has entered popular culture as the gentle voice of God in such fiction films as *Little Children.*

In 1989, I worked for Fanning when I produced "The Battle for Eastern Airlines" for *Frontline.* I remember that he was clear about what he wanted, interfered very little (once we agreed on the approach), and gave good notes. When *Frontline* won the duPont the following year, Fanning thanked every producer and correspondent by name, a small but important gesture that I never forgot.

While Fanning has left, he couldn't just walk away. He had to be sure that what he had created and nurtured would endure. "It was his baby," said one *Frontline* producer, "and he was possessive about it."

Enter Raney Aronson-Rath. In 2012, Fanning tapped her to be his deputy executive producer in what one *Frontline* staffer called a "public mentoring."

Aronson-Rath had been a documentary producer and journalist in her own right, having worked at ABC News, *The Wall Street Journal,* and *Frontline.* Now, with Fanning still watching from the front pew as an executive producer at large, she will reach out to a younger congregation online. By expanding *Frontline*'s Internet presence and joining with investigative partners, she will keep making films happen. —ALEX GIBNEY

PHOTOGRAPH BY JONAS FREDWALL KARLSSON



LAST CALL, 2015

8:05—As **Brian Williams** describes the gun battle he and the parking valets engaged in upon his arrival, **Pope Francis** drops in, looks around, says "Who am I to judge?," and runs out to catch the new *Star Wars*. **8:27—**"It's gonna be huuuuuuuuge!" says **Donald Trump,** describing to a skeptical **Megyn Kelly** the nearly 2,000-mile-long cake he says happy Mexican bakers will deliver when he's president. **8:53—**As **Amy Schumer** and **Caitlyn Jenner** discuss the shortcomings of the American male, aspiring African-American **Rachel Dolezal** shares stories of struggle with **Viola Davis, Uzo Aduba,** and **Regina King. 9:09—**Inveterate instigator **Bernie Sanders** arrives looking for a party to crash, but after he is denied admission by Kentucky county clerk **Kim Davis,** he heads for **Hillary Clinton's** never-ending Evite-only bash. **9:45—**Having seen enough, **David Letterman** and **Jon Stewart** check out early, only to run into escaped Mexican drug lord **El Chapo** and his date, Clinton Correctional Facility enabler **Joyce Mitchell. 10:00—**Deflated N.F.L. commish



For the key to who is who, turn to page 139.

Roger Goodell tries to present **Tom Brady** with a make-up gift—a pair of suspenders—but instead the glammy QB shouts "Pump up the volume" to karaoke queen **Taylor Swift,** who is currently singing "Shake It Off" to **Jordan Spieth, Serena Williams,** and **American Pharoah,** big winners still lamenting ones that got away. **10:14**—Ordering Cuba libres for the house, **Raúl Castro** invites **Kourtney Kardashian,** feeling free, to rumba. **10:48**—Boredom sets in. While angry Baltimore mom **Toya Graham** shows U.F.C. superstar **Ronda Rousey** how to throw a right hook, sharpshooters **Stephen Curry** and **Carli Lloyd** take turns knocking miniature Minions off the head of a meditating **Don Draper.** **11:28**—Last licks: **Harper Lee** explains that, in her next sequel, **Atticus Finch** will be a misunderstood Speaker of the House, while weepy **John Boehner** quietly sings "Can't Feel My Face." **11:59**—*Boom boom boom!* The whole house shakes. Has **Ben Carson** finally suffered a meltdown? No, it's just 2016, knocking at the door. –JAMIE MALANOWSKI



One thing the author *didn't* worry about when he wrote his 2010 best-seller, *The Big Short,* was how to interest Hollywood. Who would—or could—make a movie about credit-default swaps? As Brad Pitt, Steve Carell, Ryan Gosling, and Christian Bale bring the book's complex narrative to life, MICHAEL LEWIS explains his mistake

BIG SHORT,



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAAP BUITENDIJK/© 2015 PARAMOUNT PICTURES

WAKE-UP CALL
Ryan Gosling plays the truth-telling but unreliable narrator in Adam McKay's film adaptation of Michael Lewis's *The Big Short.*

BIG SCREEN

In early 2008, I started working on what became my book *The Big Short.* I'd written one book about Wall Street, *Liar's Poker,* and pretty much assumed I'd never write another, as I further assumed that nothing would ever happen on Wall Street that was as interesting to me as what had happened to me—or, if it did, I'd be the last person anyone on Wall Street would want to tell about it. What caught my attention in late 2007 were the weird, amorphous, and ever growing trading losses in the subprime-mortgage bond market suffered by the big Wall Street banks. Citigroup's losses went from $6 billion to $40 billion to more than $65 billion. Merrill Lynch announced a $4.5 billion hit, then revised it to $19 billion and then finally to more than $50 billion. Morgan Stanley announced that it had lost more than $9 billion on what appeared to be a bet by a single trader. The big Wall Street banks had become the dumb money. Their employees, the putative best and brightest, and surely the most self-interested people on the planet, were committing mass suicide. How had that happened?

Someone had to be on the other side of the big Wall Street firms' stupid bets. I set out to find as many of these people as I could. There turned out to be about 15 of them, who had gone all in on the bet against subprime-mortgage bonds. The group included some seriously interesting and peculiar people—the sort of oddballs and misfits who would have a hard time getting a job at a big Wall Street bank. Several had come to the subprime-mortgage bond market cold, with little knowledge of bonds or mortgages and none at all of credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. Yet they'd found a way to see what the expert insiders had missed: that the big Wall Street banks had become so bizarrely organized that it was hard to say where their stupidity ended and their corruption began. This handful of peculiar people had bet directly against the biggest banks on Wall Street, filled with the putatively smartest people, and made billions: how had THAT happened?

To my surprise these peculiar people proved willing to tell me their stories. But when I set out to retell them I ran into a couple of problems. One was the sheer complexity of modern finance: how to explain credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations to my mother? I'm actually not sure that my mother ever read *The Big Short*—she prefers mysteries—but she has always been my standard: if my mother can't understand what I'm saying, there's no point in saying it. The second, related problem was how to get my mother to *want* to understand credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. It's never enough to explain complicated things to a reader; the reader needs first to want to know about them. If the thing is seriously complicated, the reader must very badly want to know about it. My job, as I saw it, was to make the reader badly want to know about credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. The marvelous characters who had foreseen the collapse of the financial system became the solution to both my problems. My reader (so I hoped) would feel it was worth trying to understand credit-default swaps because these enthralling characters were also trying to understand them.

Even then, I wasn't so sure. One measure of my uncertainty can be found on page 77 of the book, in a footnote. "Dear Reader," it begins, "If you have followed the story this far, you deserve . . . a gold star," and then goes on to apologize for the demands the story had placed on her. It was an apology to my mother.

One problem I distinctly did NOT worry about when I wrote *The Big Short* was how to write it so that it would become a movie. Who'd make a movie about credit-default swaps? Who for that matter would make a movie of any book of mine? By 2008, when I started gathering string for *The Big Short,* I had come to think of the movie business as a place that spent huge sums of money with incredible enthusiasm to ensure the movies of books were never made. That year I had the fifth of what had become an annual conversation with Billy Beane, about the Insane Finances of the Movie Business. Billy was the general manager of the Oakland A's and the main character of another book I'd written, *Moneyball.* After *Moneyball* was published, in 2003, some movie people called him to ask if they might buy his "life rights" so they might make a movie of the book. Billy took the movie people at their word: he thought they actually intended to make a movie about his life. The idea disturbed him. The book had already brought him more attention and hassle than he wanted in one lifetime. He would have paid the movie people to prevent the book from becoming a movie. He called me to say as much.

"You're seeing this entirely the wrong way," I said, or something like it. "These movie people will send you free money, year after year, so they have time to figure out that they never, ever want to make a movie of your life."

"How do you know that?"

"Because that's what they always do. They send you money until they figure out you're not a movie, only a book."

That had been my experience for 20 years. The movie people would call to say how excited they were about some book or magazine article I'd written. They'd send me money, frosted with enthusiasm and rumors. (We're talking to Mike Nichols to direct it! . . . Marlon Brando wants to play John Gutfreund! . . . Tom Cruise wants to play you!) And then, one day about two years later, all of it would simply stop—the enthusiasm, the rumors, and eventually the money. It felt like being inside a stock-market bubble, with my story as the object of speculation. I took no offense. I'd done no extra work. They'd paid me for nothing. In every case I felt I had tricked them into buying something they couldn't use, by writing a "true story."

The movie people long for "true stories." The reason for this is not that they long for the truth. Actually, I don't know the reason for this: it may be as simple as that it is a lot easier to excite other movie people, without demanding they read anything, if you can claim that the story is true. But not all true stories are equally easy to turn into movies. The sort of true stories I write tend to contain long passages about such abstruse subjects as mortgage bonds or baseball statistics. I assumed the movie people, after they had sent me a check, came to their senses and realized how much harder it was to make a movie about mortgage bonds or baseball statistics than to make another *Spider-Man.*

"Just say yes and take the money before they change their minds," I told Billy Beane, back in 2003.

By 2008 he was convinced of the genius of my approach to the movie business. The *Moneyball* movie was clearly never going to happen and yet every year or so he'd still receive a check, to renew the option. Each time he'd call me, laughing, and saying (roughly), "This is so great! It's like free money!"

Then something changed. As I was finishing up *The Big Short,* a writer-director named John Lee Hancock began filming my book *The Blind Side.* The movie studio that had bought the rights to film it (with the usual unbridled enthusiasm) had secretly decided that it really only wanted to make it if Julia Roberts wanted to be in it, without, apparently, first checking with Julia Roberts. Julia Roberts did not want to be in it. John Lee Hancock had trundled his funny and sad script for *The Blind Side* all over Los Angeles and been turned down by every studio. The movie executives all said the same thing: the story wasn't commercial enough. *The Blind*



Side got made into a movie only because Fred Smith, the billionaire founder of Federal Express, knew personally the Tuohy family, the book's main characters, and thought the whole story was just great, so why shouldn't it make for a great movie? (It remains a mystery to me why movie people don't think more like Fred Smith.) The production company Smith bankrolled made *The Blind Side* for $29 million. (His daughter Molly was the film's executive producer.) The movie took in $255 million in domestic ticket sales and a lot more in foreign sales and TV rights and DVD sales.

Then, the following year, as I was handing the manuscript of *The Big Short* to my publisher, Billy Beane called and said, "You bastard, Brad Pitt is on his way to my house. The babysitter showed up wearing a dress, and my wife is putting on makeup."

I now think of the movie industry not just as a place that pays writers not to make movies of their books. It's also a place where movies of books happen, but only in response to a specific kind of accident. The accident is when the book collides with one of about 100 people on the planet who either are willing to pay for a movie to be made or have the ability to persuade other people to pay for it. Fred Smith decides he is willing to pay for *The Blind Side* and, because he has the money, *The Blind Side* gets made. Brad Pitt decides that he's going to make *Moneyball* and, because he can persuade others to pay for it, *Moneyball* gets made. The writer-director Adam McKay reads *The Big Short* and tells his agent that he'd really like to make it into a movie, and his agent (this part is just movie-business rumor) tells his (reluctant) movie studio that the director might reconsider his lack of interest in making another *Anchorman* movie for them if they first let him make *The Big Short.* And because Adam McKay's five previous movies have taken in a total of $725 million, while costing just $313.5 million, *The Big Short* gets made.

My role in making the movies of my books—the role of the author—has been essentially that of a spectator. I think it is fair to say that the people who make movies from books would just as soon that the books' authors be dead. I don't take this personally. When it comes time to turn his book into a movie the author has little of value to add and has the power to become a serious nuisance. At a public screening of the first (silent) movie made from *The Great Gatsby* the Fitzgeralds walked out. During the making of *Patriot Games,* Tom Clancy declared war on Paramount. There's a long list of authors who have bitched and moaned about what the movie people have done to their precious works of art. In my view authors who sell the movie rights to their books should just cash the check and shut up. So what if you don't care for the movie? The people who bought your book didn't set out to offend you. Sometimes they simply don't know how to make a good movie; sometimes the movie doesn't turn out as everyone had hoped; and sometimes *the movie is better than your book.* If you don't want your book to be changed in any way, don't sell the rights to change it.

Oddly, the movie people are slow to make explicit this view, even to themselves. In my experience, no matter how badly an author behaves, they try to keep in mind what they liked and admired about his work and bend over backward to make the author feel as if he has been included in the process of turning his book into a movie. They do this not because they actually care what the author thinks. Deep down they know that an author, if listened to, might cause huge financial losses and destroy countless filmmaking careers. They merely want the author to feel as if he's been included—in part because it's a nuisance to have him complaining about the movie in public, but also because they don't want to seem rude. Movie people are compulsively polite. They might waste your time, and other people's money, but in any social interaction they almost dare you to be the first person to behave rudely.

Having said all that, the movies that have been made from my books have, in my view, been pretty great. It's no use trying to shift gears here and claim credit for this. There's no obvious correlation between the quality of a movie and the quality of the book it springs from: good movies have been made from bad books, just as bad movies have been made from good books. Each of the three times I have sat in the darkened room and watched for the first time a movie of my book I have felt simple delighted surprise. With each movie the surprise has been greater. *The Blind Side* wasn't that hard to imagine as a movie—at the heart of the book was a bizarre and moving family drama. *Moneyball* was hard to imagine as a movie, but at least it was about baseball and thus organically linked to popular culture. Wall Street, even in the aftermath of a financial crisis that has cost so many so much, is not. The behavior of our money people is still treated as a subject for specialists. This is a huge cultural mistake. High finance touches—ruins—the lives of ordinary people in a way that, say, baseball does not, unless you are a Cubs fan. And yet, ordinary people, even those who have been most violated, are never left with a clear sense of how they've been touched or by whom. Wall Street, like a clever pervert, is often suspected but seldom understood and never convicted.

It is my hope that Adam McKay's *The Big Short* might actually help change this situation. The very material I would have thought would frighten away a movie director McKay embraces. He lucidly explains credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations! He captures the essence of the behavior that led to the recent financial catastrophe, and of the main characters of my book—in ways that I suspect will haunt their real-life loved ones. *The Big Short* is just a movie, but it's also an invitation, to a huge popular audience, to have a smart and interesting discussion about the place of money and finance in all our lives.

I don't want to ruin the movie for anyone. But I do want to try to explain, briefly—to myself as much as anyone—how a movie writer and director who has made only five movies, all goofball comedies, has succeeded where others have failed in bridging the gap between Wall Street and popular culture. I can think of three reasons CONTINUED ON PAGE 136

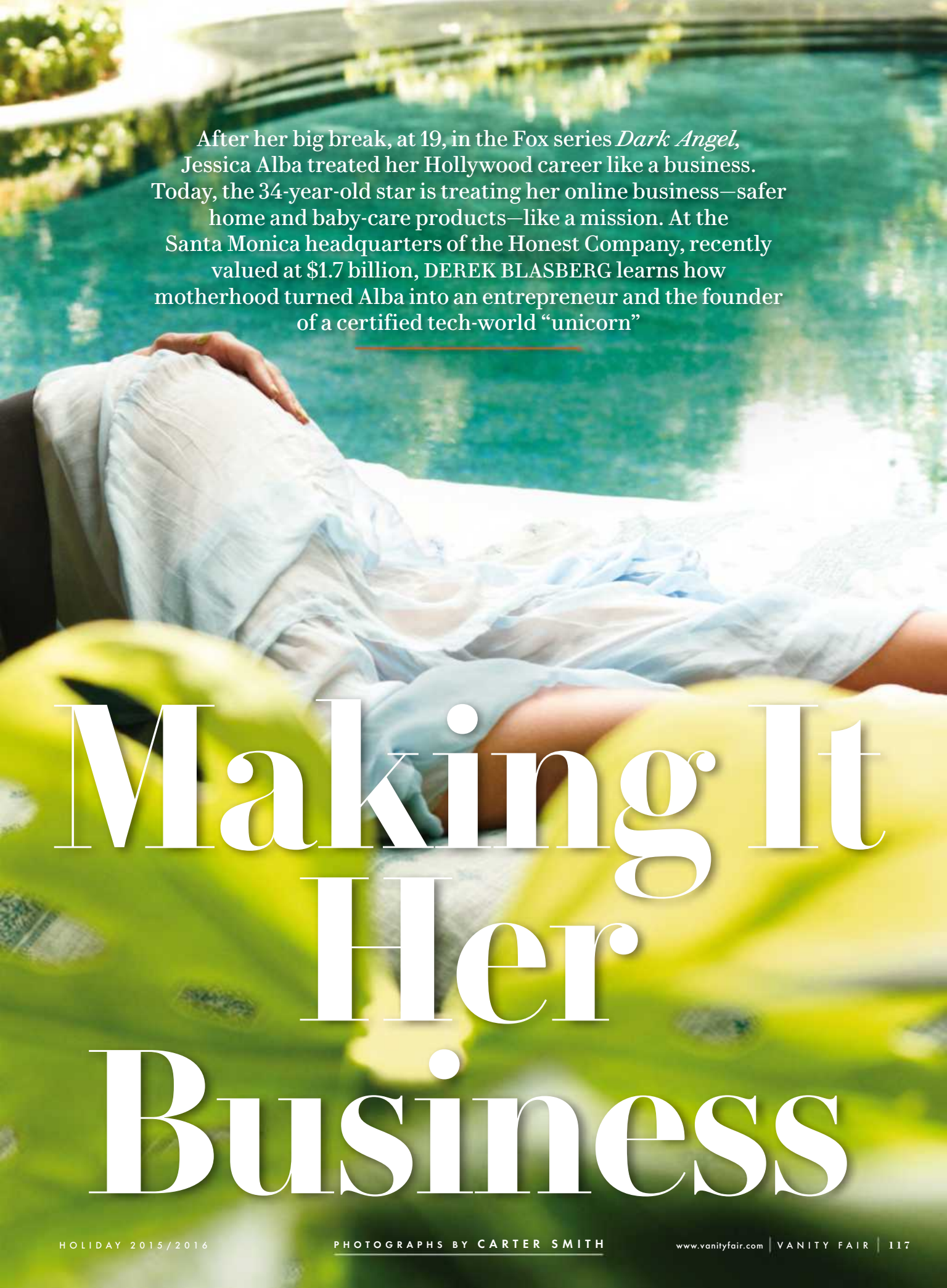
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HONEST BEAUTY
Jessica Alba, photographed in Santa Monica.

ALBA WEARS A GOWN BY GUCCI; EARRINGS BY JENNIFER FISHER.

STYLED BY SIMON ROBINS; HAIR PRODUCTS BY GHD; MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY HONEST BEAUTY; NAIL ENAMEL BY CHANEL; HAIR BY DAVID BABAII; MAKEUP BY RACHEL GOODWIN; MANICURE BY ASHLIE JOHNSON; SET DESIGN BY STEVE HALTERMAN STUDIO. PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY PORTFOLIO ONE; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS



After her big break, at 19, in the Fox series *Dark Angel,* Jessica Alba treated her Hollywood career like a business. Today, the 34-year-old star is treating her online business—safer home and baby-care products—like a mission. At the Santa Monica headquarters of the Honest Company, recently valued at $1.7 billion, DEREK BLASBERG learns how motherhood turned Alba into an entrepreneur and the founder of a certified tech-world "unicorn"

Making It Her Business

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARTER SMITH

Jessica Alba's parking spot at the Honest Company, the four-year-old consumer-products start-up that wowed the tech community with a $1.7 billion valuation this summer, shares a building with Yahoo in Santa Monica, California, and has a bright-green sign bearing her name. Before founding Honest, Alba was best known as the actress in roles such as a hip-hop choreographer with a heart of gold in 2003's *Honey* and a strong-willed stripper in Robert Rodriguez's *Sin City* franchise. I arrive for a tour at 3:32 P.M., and what transpires in the next 26 minutes is either a peek into Alba's career as one of the tech world's savviest businesswomen or the greatest performance of her acting career.

Alba's cobalt-steel desk is part of an open-plan office that houses some of Honest's almost 500 employees, all of whom have smiles on their faces and most of whom look to be in their 20s. "We hire a lot of people right out of college," says Alba, whose current age, 34, makes her older than the office average. Next to Alba's computer are towers of diapers featuring adorable cartoons. "It's 'the Paris collection,' so we're looking at French flags, the Eiffel Tower, a French bulldog that says 'Le Woof.'" Alba approves the diapers but flags the tower's salmon-colored packaging because the hue may skew too feminine for parents of boys. Behind her are new logo samples, each one a different shade of peach, but she'll go through those later. She shows me a cozy, dimly lit room with scented candles where new mothers can pump their breast milk in private. And, in the hall, she overhears a conversation about a gifting suite the company may host at New York Fashion Week. She had hoped to create an editors' lounge for makeup touch-ups and 15-minute massages but wonders if the $25,000 expense justifies the reach. (A single post viewed by her more than six million Instagram followers makes more of an impact.)

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For more on Jessica Alba's **STYLE**, go to VF.COM/HOLIDAY2015/2016.

"Where's the music up in here? Where's RiRi and 'Yonce?," Alba shouts when we're in the on-site photography studio. A mixed-race model with millions of adorable freckles is being photographed for a skin-care package and blushes when Alba gushes about her "modern beauty." Alba suddenly checks the time and rushes the end of our tour, which includes the showroom, where new products are merchandised; the art department, where packaging is developed; the customer-service department, where employees answer up to 3,500 calls and e-mails per day.

And then, at exactly 3:58 P.M., Alba spins and says, "I'm sorry, but my four P.M. appointment is here."

Director James Cameron, self-described god of the movie industry, gave Alba her big break in 1998 when he cast her as the lead in the short-lived TV series *Dark Angel.* He isn't shocked by Honest's success: "If you went back to the day I met Jessica and told me, 'This girl is going to build a billion-dollar company,' I would've said, 'I believe it.'" Cameron's production company auditioned more than 1,000 actresses for the part before he discovered her. Something about her glamorous sour puss made him press Pause. "She was slumped over with her hair in her face and a look of defiance. But when the camera hit her—wham!—there was such punk attitude." (Alba admits she was a broody teenager—she has no Jell-O commercials in her credits.)

Dark Angel was set in the future (at the time, 2009 was the future), and her character, Max Guevera—a government-created, genetically enhanced super-soldier who escapes from a secret lab—presented Alba with more than a threat of stardom. "This was a $125 million production, and we were resting it on the shoulders of a teenager," Cameron remembers. "She totally stepped up to the plate and didn't fall or falter." Alba worked 86-hour weeks in Vancouver, did many of her own stunts, and, Cameron adds, "never backed down from a fight. Early on, she had real integrity."

Alba's father, Mark, was in the U.S. Air Force and moved the family to Biloxi, Mississippi, and Del Rio, Texas, before settling in Southern California's Inland Empire, where he started a real-estate company. Of her mother, Cathy, Alba says with pride, "There was nothing [she] didn't do. She was the manager of a movie theater; she went to cosmetology school; she was a bartender, waitress, and then my manager." Cathy began working at Honest last year and trains retail partners as a senior brand educator.

When Alba turned 11, most of her family—brother, four cousins, aunt, aunt's sister, aunt's sister's boyfriend, and her mother—attended an open casting call at the Beverly Hills Studio. Thousands applied, but it was Jessica who received a year's worth of acting classes, which she condensed into a summer so she wouldn't miss school.

Alba's childhood was marked by two things: illnesses—many of which she can now identify as asthma and allergy-related—that landed her in the hospital often, and a burning desire to leave a mark on the world, which at the age of 12 meant becoming a devout born-again Christian. "I was seeking a purpose," Alba says of her years as a member of a conservative Christian youth group. "I wanted to exist for a reason." This lasted until she was 17, when, she says, she was turned off by the boundaries and labels set by fellow churchgoers. That year, she attended an acting workshop in Vermont and "fell crazy in love with a cross-dressing ballet dancer who had a baby and was bisexual. I was like, 'There's just no way he's going to hell!'" Acting opened her to a new world of creative people and a community where she belonged. "I felt like, at the end of the day, God is love and everyone is human."

Returning to California, Alba made a pact with herself: "If I wasn't going to get a big job by the time I was 18, I was going back to school." According to plan, she was cast in *Dark Angel* in 1998, and she set out to approach her career "like my own Hollywood business." She sought tentpole franchises, such as the *Sin City* films, 2004's superhero thriller *Fantastic Four,* and her role as a crazy/flirty pharmaceutical rep in 2010's *Little Fockers.* She gave her publicist a dictum that for every placement in a men's magazine (such as one of *Maxim*'s hottest women) she wanted coverage in three women's magazines. "People doubted me as an actress, and that's something that drove me. I was not going to be pegged as an action-comic-book fangirl." Hollywood wouldn't be the only industry that underestimated Alba.

The Honest Company's origins are now tech-world legend. When Alba was pregnant with her first daughter, Honor, now seven—husband and father is Cash Warren, a Yale graduate and a producer and tech investor—her friends threw a baby shower and she received a closetful of new baby clothes. When

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DARK ANGEL
"People doubted me as an actress, and that's something that drove me," says Alba.

ALBA WEARS A DRESS BY GIORGIO ARMANI; EARRINGS BY VAN CLEEF & ARPELS.



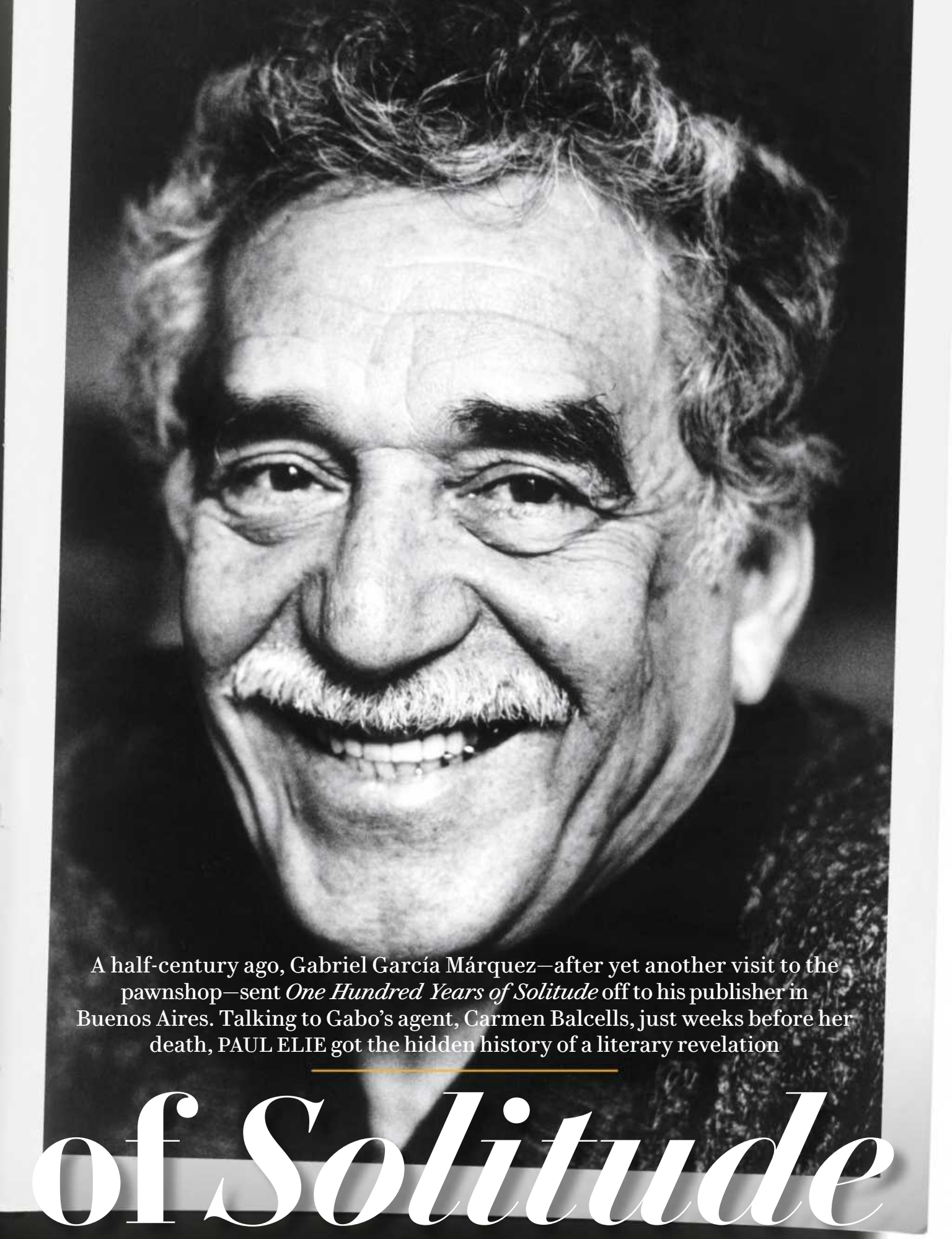
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SUCCESS STORY
Gabriel García Márquez in Barcelona, 1991. *Inset,* the first edition of his masterwork, completed in 1966 and published in Argentina the next year.



50 Years

LARGE PHOTOGRAPHS BY SALLY SOAMES/CAMERA PRESS/REDUX; INSET COURTESY OF HEATHER PISANI/GLENN HOROWITZ BOOKSELLER, INC.



A half-century ago, Gabriel García Márquez—after yet another visit to the pawnshop—sent *One Hundred Years of Solitude* off to his publisher in Buenos Aires. Talking to Gabo's agent, Carmen Balcells, just weeks before her death, PAUL ELIE got the hidden history of a literary revelation

of *Solitude*

The house, in a quiet part of Mexico City, had a study within, and in the study he found a solitude he had never known before and would never know again. Cigarettes (he smoked 60 a day) were on the worktable. LPs were on the record player: Debussy, Bartók, *A Hard Day's Night.* Stuck up on the wall were charts of the history of a Caribbean town he called Macondo and the genealogy of the family he named the Buendías. Outside, it was the 1960s; inside, it was the deep time of the pre-modern Americas, and the author at his typewriter was all-powerful.

He visited a plague of insomnia upon the people of Macondo; he made a priest levitate, powered by hot chocolate; he sent down a swarm of yellow butterflies. He led his people on the long march through civil war and colonialism and banana-republicanism; he trailed them into their bedrooms and witnessed sexual adventures obscene and incestuous. "In my dreams, I was inventing literature," he recalled. Month by month the typescript grew, presaging the weight that the great novel and the "solitude of fame," as he would later put it, would inflict on him.

Gabriel García Márquez began writing *Cien Años de Soledad—One Hundred Years of Solitude*—a half-century ago, finishing in late 1966. The novel came off the press in Buenos Aires on May 30, 1967, two days before *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* was released, and the response among Spanish-language readers was akin to Beatlemania: crowds, cameras, exclamation points, a sense of a new era beginning. In 1970 the book appeared in English, followed by a paperback edition with a burning sun on its cover, which became a totem of the decade. By the time García Márquez was awarded the Nobel Prize, in 1982, the novel was considered the *Don Quixote* of the Global South, proof of Latin-American literary prowess, and the author was "Gabo," known all over the continent by a single name, like his Cuban friend Fidel.

Many years later, interest in Gabo and his great novel is surging. The Harry Ransom Center, at the University of Texas, recently paid $2.2 million to acquire his archives—including a Spanish typescript of *Cien Años de Soledad*—and in October a gathering of his family members and academics took a fresh look at his legacy, repeatedly invoking the book as his magnum opus.

Unofficially, it's everybody's favorite work of world literature and the novel that, more than any other since World War II, has inspired novelists of our time—from Toni Morrison to Salman Rushdie to Junot Díaz. A scene in the movie *Chinatown* takes place at a Hollywood hacienda dubbed El Macondo Apartments. Bill Clinton, during his first term as president, made it known that he would like to meet Gabo when they were both on Martha's Vineyard; they wound up swapping insights about Faulkner over dinner at Bill and Rose Styron's place. (Carlos Fuentes, Vernon Jordan, and Harvey Weinstein were at the table.) When García Márquez died, in April 2014, Barack Obama joined Clinton in mourning him, calling him "one of my favorites from the time I was young" and mentioning his cherished, inscribed copy of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* "It's the book that redefined not just Latin-American literature but literature, period," insists Ilan Stavans, the pre-eminent scholar of Latino culture in the U.S., who says he has read the book 30 times.

How is it that this novel could be sexy, entertaining, experimental, politically radical, and wildly popular all at once? Its success was no sure thing, and the story of how it came about is a crucial and little-known chapter in the literary history of the last half-century.

Leaving Home

The creator of contemporary fiction's most famous village was a city man. Born in 1927 in the Colombian village of Aracataca, near the Caribbean coast, and schooled inland in a suburb of Bogotá, Gabriel García Márquez quit pre-law studies to become a journalist in the cities of Cartagena, Barranquilla (writing a column), and Bogotá (writing movie reviews). As the noose of dictatorship tightened, he went on assignment to Europe—and out of harm's way. He had hard times there. In Paris, he turned in deposit bottles for cash; in Rome, he took classes in experimental filmmaking; he shivered in London and sent back dispatches from East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Returning south—to Venezuela—he was nearly arrested during a random sweep by military police. When Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, García Márquez signed on with Prensa Latina, a press agency funded by the new Communist government, and after a stint in Havana he moved to New York in 1961 with his wife, Mercedes, and their young son, Rodrigo.

The city, he later said, "was putrefying, but also was in the process of rebirth, like the jungle. It fascinated me." The family stayed in the Webster Hotel, at 45th and Fifth, and then with friends in Queens, but Gabo spent most of his time at the press office near Rockefeller Center, in a room with a lone window above a vacant lot overrun with rats. The phone rang and rang with calls from inflamed Cuban exiles who saw the agency as an outpost of the Castro regime they detested, and he kept an iron rod at the ready in case of attack.

He was writing fiction all the while: *Leaf Storm* in Bogotá; *In Evil Hour* and *No One Writes to the Colonel* in Paris; *Big Mama's Funeral* in Caracas. When hard-line Communists took over the press service and ousted its editor, García Márquez quit in solidarity. He would move to Mexico City; he would focus on fiction. But first he would see the South of William Faulkner, whose books he had read in translation since his early 20s. Traveling by Greyhound, the family was treated as "dirty Mexicans," he recounted—refused rooms and restaurant service. "The immaculate parthenons amidst the cotton fields, the farmers taking their siesta beneath the eaves of roadside inns,

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MAGIC GLOBALISM

(1) Crowds in Mexico City wait to pay their respects to García Márquez after his death, in 2014. (2) His longtime agent, Carmen Balcells, at her home in Barcelona, 2007. (3) García Márquez and Balcells with Fidel Castro in Havana in the early 1980s. (4) With his wife, Mercedes, in Bogotá, Colombia—the country of his birth—in 1967, the year he published *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* which would become a worldwide best-seller. (5) García Márquez in Cartagena, Colombia, where some of his novels are set and where he kept a home, 1991. (6) The novelist in 1975, wearing his most famous book.

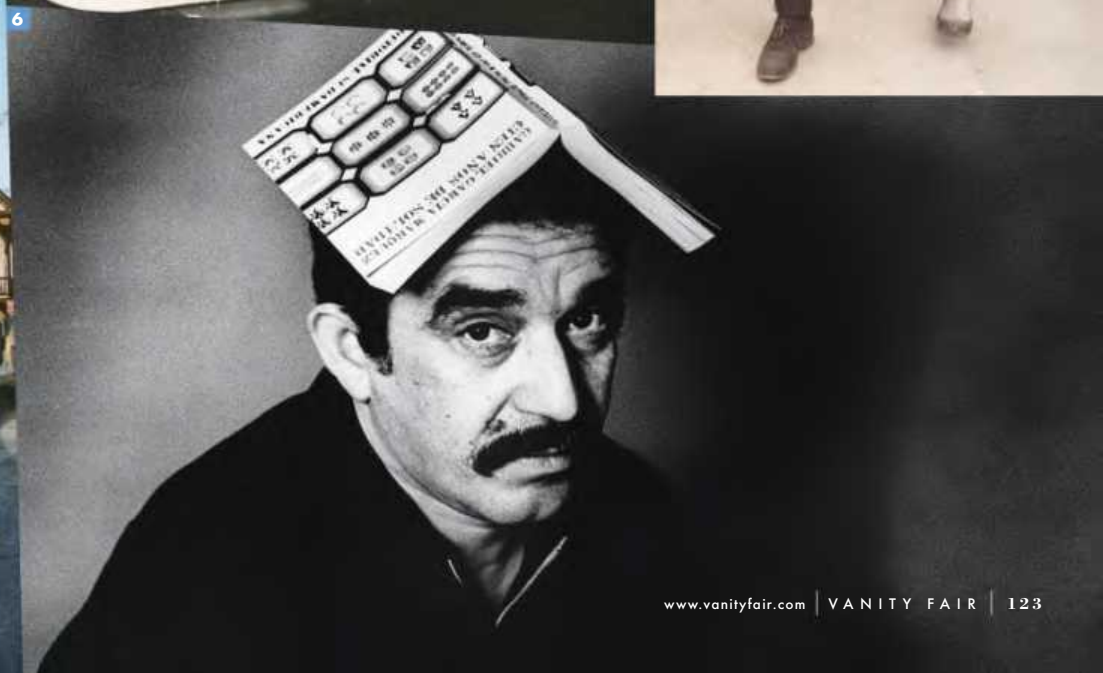














WOOLWORTH IT
The Woolworth Building, architect Cass Gilbert's Neo-Gothic masterpiece, on Broadway between Park Place and Barclay Street, in New York City, built in 1913. *Opposite,* architect Thierry Despont in the building's copper-clad spire.

MONUME

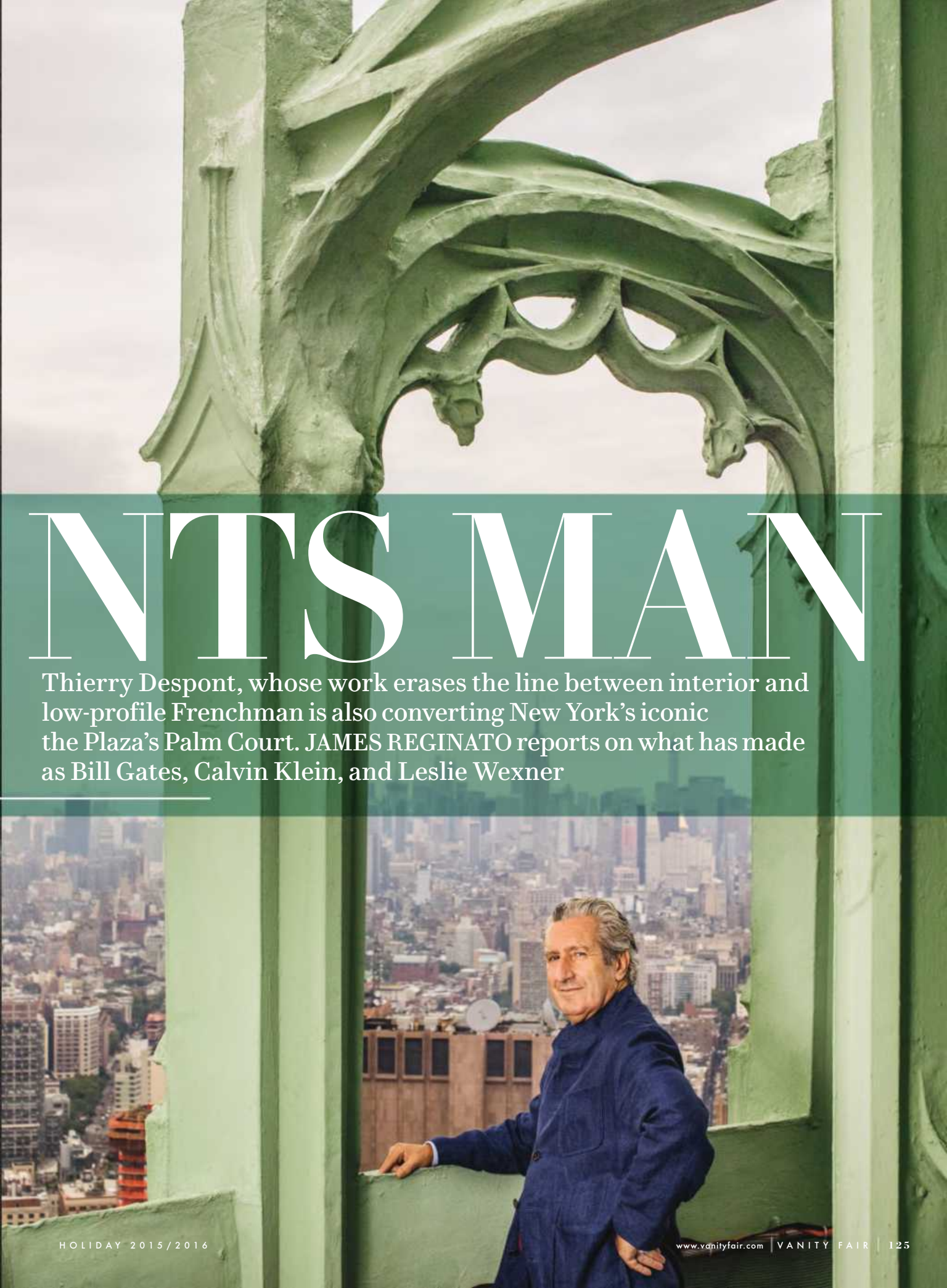
When money meets history meets taste, the architect in question is often exterior design. As he finishes a massive renovation of the Ritz Paris, the Woolworth Building tower to trophy residences and has just revamped Despont the choice of such modern-day Midases

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHAN BECKER

GROOMING BY CANDICE FORNESS

NTS MAN

Thierry Despont, whose work erases the line between interior and low-profile Frenchman is also converting New York's iconic the Plaza's Palm Court. JAMES REGINATO reports on what has made as Bill Gates, Calvin Klein, and Leslie Wexner



The April 24, 1913, grand opening of the Woolworth Building, on Broadway in Lower Manhattan, was one of capitalism's ultimate feel-good and look-good moments. Freshly crowned as the world's tallest building, it soared 792 feet into the sky, nearly three times as high as the 280-foot steeple of nearby Trinity Church, which had reigned as New York's loftiest structure for nearly half a century.

"I do not want a mere building. I want something that will be an ornament to the city," dime-store mogul Frank Winfield Woolworth told architect Cass Gilbert, a midwesterner who had become one of America's first celebrity architects, famed for his Beaux Arts–style monuments, such as the U.S. Supreme Court building. For the Woolworth Building, Gilbert's use of a new steel-frame technology enhanced the basic principles of skyscraper construction for the next generation. But the public would be equally delighted with the building's rich ornamentation, including humorous gargoyle-like figures carved into the lobby ceiling depicting Woolworth (counting out nickels and dimes) and Gilbert (cradling a model of the building).

At 7:29 P.M., after Woolworth had ushered 900 dinner guests into the building from which he would run his empire, a telegram was sent to the White House, cuing Woodrow Wilson in the Oval Office: all was ready for him to press the button installed on his desk that would illuminate every floor. In a thunderous oration later that evening, the Reverend S. Parkes Cadman, a leading cleric of the day, likened the Neo-Gothic-style tower to a "Cathedral of Commerce . . . piercing space like a battlement in the paradise of God."

A century after Wilson turned on the lights, an ambitious construction project is under way to convert the Woolworth tower into one of the ultimate residences for today's titans of commerce. Thirty-four condominiums will be offered for sale, including a five-story trophy penthouse with an expected price tag of $110 million. (If the apartment sells for anywhere near that figure, it will double the record for a downtown condominium set in January 2014 with the sale of a $50.9 million penthouse at the Walker Tower, in Chelsea.)

According to Kenneth S. Horn, president of Alchemy Properties, the tower's new lead owner, the renovation and redesign of the landmark property to make it fit for modern-day Midases could be entrusted to one man. "Thierry Despont was the only one who *got* it," he says.

Since opening his firm, the Office of Thierry W Despont Ltd., in New York in 1980, the French-born architect-designer has quickly risen to the pinnacle of his profession. Seamlessly marrying architecture with interior design in his projects, he is practically in a league of his own.

Born in Limoges, France, Despont, now 67 years old, attended the École des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, where he honed his skills as a superb draftsman, and then earned a master's degree in city planning and urban design from Harvard University in 1974. In one of his first jobs, with the international firm Llewelyn-Davies, he lived in Tehran, where he worked on a master plan for the city center under a commission from the Shah of Iran.

When Despont moved to New York and opened his own office, his talent—as well as his Gallic charm and good looks—were quickly recognized. Marietta Tree, a leading social Brahmin of the time and a former partner at Llewelyn-Davies, was especially helpful in establishing Despont's career in New York, as she recommended him to her blue-chip friends. He opened an office, on Greenwich Street, in Tribeca ("It was the cheapest place in New York, and all I could afford," he recalls), and soon was renovating apartments for the likes of Jayne Wrightsman, Annette and Oscar de la Renta, Susan and John Gutfreund, and Terry and Jane Semel. Despont's work deftly fuses classicism with modernism, thanks to his skill in streamlining classical elements.

It was his being hired as the associate architect of the centennial restoration of the Statue of Liberty, completed in 1986, that really put him on the map. A massive undertaking that involved $60 million, and more than 400 scientists, engineers, artisans, and workers, the project took two years. Major commissions followed, ranging from the Getty Center, in Los Angeles (where Despont designed all of the galleries inside the $1.3 billion complex designed by architect Richard Meier in 1997), to Claridge's hotel and the Polo Ralph Lauren flagship boutique in London.

The bread and butter of Despont's business, however—and his passion—is designing houses from scratch, inside and out. "Initially, we were only doing the architecture, but then I thought, I want to do it all," he says, referring to the incorporation of interior decoration in his projects. "So that's what I've been doing for the last 20 years. Honestly, I can't work any other way. I can't tell you where one stops and the other one starts."

Mogul Empire

Despont characterizes his clients as "daring entrepreneurs" (they are usually referred to as "moguls"). "They come to me because they know I will give shape to their dreams," he says.

In the 90s, his stock shot up after he designed a compound for Bill and Melinda Gates on a lake outside Seattle. Among his other showplaces are a shingled oceanside mansion in East Hampton for Calvin Klein and his then wife, Kelly, and a 64,000-square-foot Georgian-style mansion outside Columbus, Ohio, for retailing magnate Leslie Wexner and his wife, Abigail.

More recently, Despont has renovated a $75 million mansion on London's Kensington Palace Gardens, purchased by Indian steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal and his wife, Usha. He has also built a chalet in Saint-Moritz for the couple.

For J. Crew C.E.O. Millard "Mickey" Drexler and his wife,

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF THIERRY DESPONT



PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ
A rendering of the interior of a Despont-designed room in the Ritz Paris, which includes refurbished boiserie and chandeliers.



POOL CUES
A rendering of the pool on the concourse level of the renovated Woolworth Building.



SUPREME COURT
The Palm Court at the Plaza hotel in New York City, renovated in May 2015 by Despont, features a restoration of the restaurant's original stained-glass ceiling.



STATUE OF LIMITATIONS
Workers on the scaffolding of the restoration project of the Statue of Liberty, 1984.

ASPEN SPREE
A Despont-designed house in Aspen, with important midcentury antiques such as a table by George Nakashima and an armchair by Hans Wegner.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, COURTESY OF THIERRY DESPONT; BY DAN CORNISH/ESTO; PHILLIP ENNIS; STEVE HEMICH

Peggy, Despont has designed a succession of homes over the course of two decades. "I'd be mortified to tell you how many," says Drexler with a laugh. "Thierry is as good as it gets. If it is a renovation, he maintains the integrity of the building and improves upon the original. In any of his projects, he has incredible vision but gets all the details that most people never see."

"I like to create a small universe," the architect once explained. "From the master plan to the doorknobs, from the trees planted outside to the way people will sit and eat and dance inside, you create and control a whole microcosm."

Wherever he puts his stamp, Despont seems to please his constituents. The secret of his success? "He knows how rich people live," explained one of his clients. The gentleman was, naturally, a very rich man.

Though, unlike many of his peers, Despont assiduously avoids the social circuit (and certainly doesn't roam around in leather bondage-wear), he routinely creates lavish entertainments for his major clients. For these exclusive events he has been known to rent architectural masterpieces around the world, such as Villa Rotonda, in the Veneto (designed by Palladio), and Château de Vaux-le-Vicomte, outside Paris (designed by Louis Le Vau), where he stages spectacular dinners for small groups. (In addition to those masters, Despont admires most of the architecture of Claude-Nicolas Ledoux, Sir Edwin Lutyens, and Tadao Ando.)

Even Despont's client presentations are elaborate, theatrical affairs, making use of exquisitely detailed watercolor renderings, drawings, and models. For the presentation to Wexner, for example, Despont cleared an entire floor of the 1920s-era former bank building where his practice was then located. All windows were blacked out, and at the appointed moment, specially designed lighting simulated a sunrise over a six-foot-long model of the proposed house, while a fog machine provided mist and a sound system played Gershwin. Wexner was reportedly so excited that he said, "Let's do it again."



SENSE OF PLACE
The Ritz Paris peeks out from behind a construction enclosure.

When his workday wraps up, Despont has a brief commute: For the past decade he has lived in a Tribeca town house with his partner, Barbara, a Dutch national whom he calls "my best critic." With two grown daughters from his previous marriage, he unwinds in various ways. "I paint, I sculpt, I fly-fish and do watercolors of the fish I fish, and I collect books on the moon," he says. In summer, he spends time at his house on the Île d'Yeu in France, where he enjoys driving his Citroën 2CV "deux chevaux."

A Diamond As Big as the Ritz

And after more than three decades, he isn't slowing down. Despont's slate of current projects includes several high-profile public buildings. His revamp of the Palm Court at the Plaza hotel was completed last spring. "I was thrilled to bring it back to its former glory and to re-create its original character of a winter garden, with lots of palm trees," he says. To that end, the designer re-lit the cupola, installed light fixtures based on originals, and designed new furniture inspired by gardens of the 1920s.

Despont is also the lead designer in the major renovation of the Cartier mansion, on Fifth Avenue. When it reopens, in the spring of 2016, the top four floors of the six-story building, formerly offices, will be transformed into more retail space. "It was built as a private home in 1905, and I want to give people the feeling they are still walking into a mansion. But the challenge is that there has to be enough interest to get people to keep going up five flights."

In Manhattan, he will also design the interiors of architect Jean Nouvel's 82-story tower, at 53 West 53rd Street, currently being erected adjacent to MoMA and scheduled for completion in 2017.

Despont's plummiest commission of late, though, is in Paris, where he is overseeing the complete renovation of the storied Ritz Paris. He was hired for the job by Mohamed Al Fayed, whose family is financing the landmark's face-lift. The project has its perils too, as Despont well knows. "Everywhere I go, people accost me: 'What are you going to do there?' If I don't do a good job on this one, I'll have to move to Patagonia!"

Talk about walking a tightrope: how to restore a grande dame that is beloved the world over but that also—let's face it—has gotten a bit worn out? "I want to bring life back to a legend," Despont explains. "But we're re-doing everything."

As he pondered how to proceed, the designer recalled a particularly memorable direction he got from a previous client. "When Ralph Lauren asked me to do his new flagship [on New Bond Street], in London, he said to me, 'Thierry, you have to create something that's never existed but that everyone will recognize.' "

For design inspiration, Despont channeled the impeccable taste of his good friend Hubert de Givenchy. "If I could capture some of his sense of design and elegance, that's what I'd like," Despont says. (The admiration is mutual: "Thierry is absolutely charming and has a brilliant mind," says the retired couturier.)

Despont plans to honor the Ritz's existing architecture and scale. "There is a natural elegance in well-thought-out French 18th-century interiors. It's all about getting the proportions right," he says. "But I want it to be comfortable. It can't

PHOTOGRAPH, LEFT, COURTESY OF THE RITZ PARIS/THIERRY DESPONT



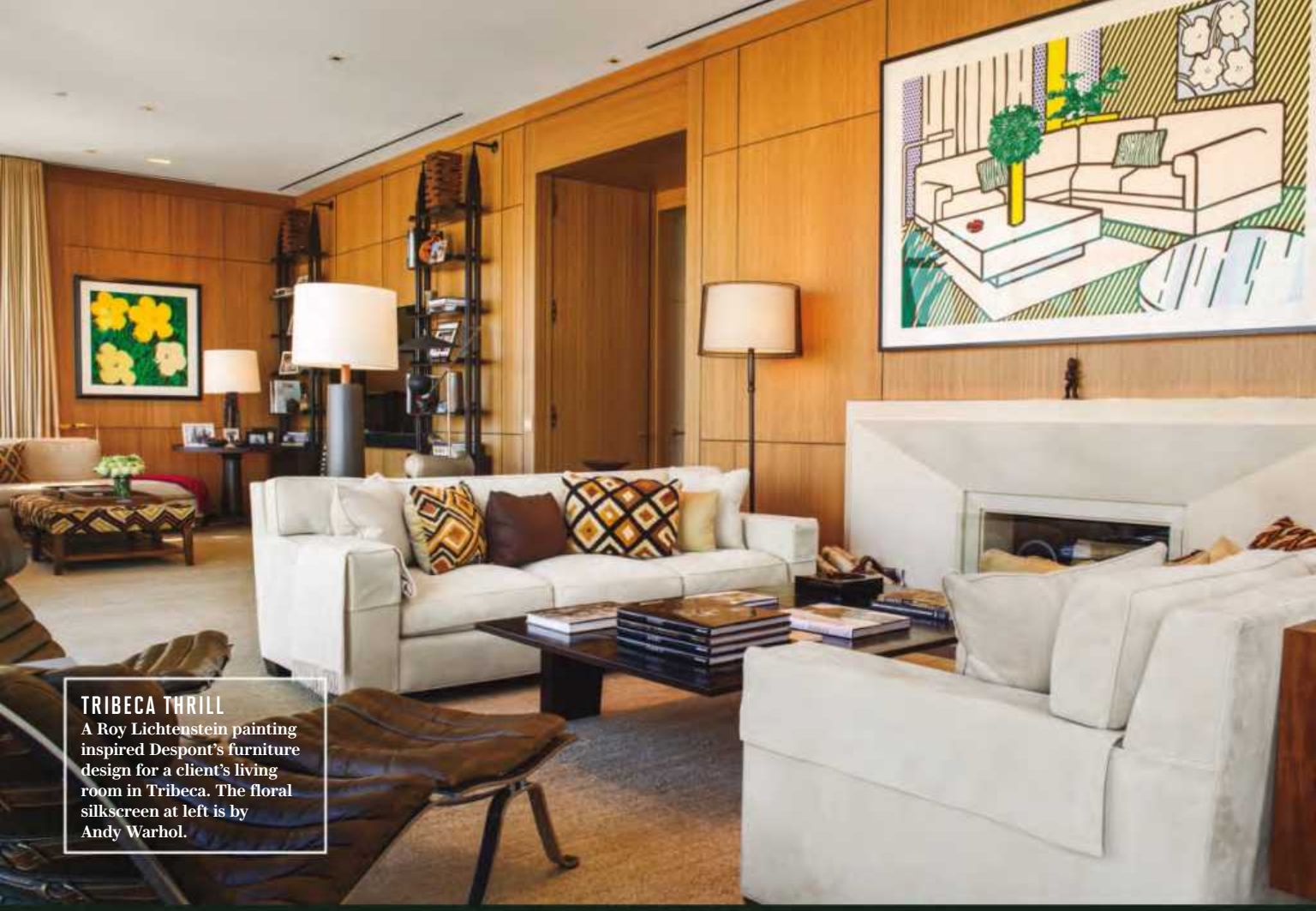
POWERFUL ORBIT
Despont in his Tribeca art studio, surrounded by his orb sculptures and paintings; these works in progress will be part of a forthcoming exhibition, "The Cabinet of Dr. Gurnwyeth."



FOUNTAIN ZEN
A depiction of the garden outside the Ritz Paris, which will open in March.

LIVING ROOM WITH A VIEW
Despont's rendering of the living room in the penthouse of 53W53, in New York City, with views of the Hudson River and beyond.

PHOTOGRAPHS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, COURTESY OF THIERRY DESPONT; BY JONATHAN BECKER, COURTESY OF THIERRY DESPONT; COURTESY OF HAYES DAVIDSON



TRIBECA THRILL
A Roy Lichtenstein painting inspired Despont's furniture design for a client's living room in Tribeca. The floral silkscreen at left is by Andy Warhol.

PALM BEACH STORY
The pool and patio area of a Despont project in Palm Beach, Florida.

be like Versailles, where you don't feel like you can sit down.

"We're in full blast on the project," he adds about the hotel, which will reopen this March. "The biggest surprise will be a huge new garden we are putting in. It's almost going to be like the Palais Royal. We've also excavated down 20 meters to build a ballroom in the basement, and there will be a new tunnel from the garage so V.I.P.'s can enter that way. We have 500 people working on-site. No corners are being cut. The Al Fayed family is committed to making it better than ever. Each suite is going to be like the most beautiful apartment in Paris."

Penthouse Fête

"This is going to be the ultimate penthouse," said Despont one afternoon as we stepped out of a construction elevator at the Woolworth Building into the approximately 9,000-square-foot, five-story penthouse, which rises to the copper-clad, pyramidal roof, where mechanical equipment was once located. "And this"—he gestured to the great room, with its 24-foot vaulted ceiling, massive fireplace, and windows on all sides—"is going to be the most amazing room in New York."

The rest of the apartment is breathtaking, too—literally, sometimes. "This is only for the brave of heart," Despont says to me after I put on a hard hat and sign an intimidating waiver, whereupon we begin ascending a series of Piranesi-esque staircases. At the very top we step onto a wraparound observatory deck, which offers a sweeping vista of Manhattan.

In 2012, Alchemy Properties paid $68 million to the Witkoff Group and Cammeby's International (which purchased the Woolworth Building in 1998, but allowed it to remain vacant when its plan to convert the top floors to luxury condominiums collapsed after 9/11) for the upper half of the landmark. (Witkoff and Cammeby's continue to own the lower half and lease the floors to commercial tenants.) Not long after the deal closed, Despont received a call from Horn. "I've got something special for you," Despont recalls him saying. "When he told me it was the Woolworth Building, I said, 'You're kidding!' "

Lessons he first acquired working on the Statue of Liberty were helpful. "That project taught me that you need to learn as much as you can about a structure before you touch it. We spent years drawing it, figuring out how it was built. That structure was absolutely brilliant. You cannot practice architecture without knowing history."

But the history of the Woolworth Building—and modern-day engineering requirements—presented a unique and often delicate set of aesthetic challenges. The interiors of 30 floors were almost entirely cleared in the course of the previous conversion attempt. Many architectural details were removed. Certain areas of the building had been abandoned for more than a decade, including the 55-foot-long swimming pool on the concourse. Others had to be created from scratch to blend in with the original interiors, including a new, separate lobby for the apartment dwellers.

Last year, when Despont presented his renovation application to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, it passed unanimously on its first round and drew plaudits from the commissioners. "This is an extraordinarily carefully conceived idea of an adaptive re-use," commented one. "Just perfect," said another.

"You can't make apartments in this building into modern, white boxes," says Despont. "If, when I am done, people just say, 'Oh, you just restored it,' I'd be happy. I'm not trying to put my stamp on it. I just want to bring it back to life and give it another 100 years." □





DESK SET
Thierry Despont in his Tribeca office, which features a Dale Chihuly glass sculpture, around which he designed his desk.

The Big Short



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 115 Adam McKay was, oddly, just the man for this job. In ascending order of importance.

(1) He shares an important quality with his Wall Street characters. McKay began his career as a stand-up comedian. He studied improv in Chicago with actor Del Close, whom he still considers the most important teacher he ever had. The improv instinct, to take what you get and to build on it, bears more than a passing resemblance to the behavior of the main characters in *The Big Short.* They came to a mushrooming financial disaster without any presuppositions. They knew nothing of subprime mortgages, or C.D.O.'s, or the other diabolical contraptions that led to the catastrophe. They weren't looking for a crisis in housing, or a collapse of the system; they were just looking to respond, cleverly, to what the system proposed. *Yes . . . And.* One way to view *The Big Short* is as an extremely clever improvisational sketch. There is a reason for that: that is how the real people on whom it is based experienced the financial crisis.

(2) An almost pathological lack of the fear of failure and ridicule. In his previous life as head writer at *Saturday Night Live,* McKay says, he used to think up 20 skits on the assumption that 18 wouldn't work—but that 2 would. He says he did the same sort of thing as a stand-up comedian, writing dozens of jokes for every one he performed. He never worried too much about his less than great ideas because he knew he'd be defined only by the great ones, and he never became too attached to any one idea, because he knew he could always find others. He was generous with his own mind, in the way that newly rich people are often openhanded with money, as they know they can always get more. This character trait is essential to *The Big Short.* There are many effective storytelling tricks in the movie that a filmmaker would never try if he worried about people wondering if he knew what he was doing. McKay's original script opened with Morgan Freeman filming a commercial for a big Wall Street bank and going on about trust and security, then stopping, turning to the audience, and saying, "Actually, that's all fucking bullshit." That was one of a bunch of ideas McKay abandoned—though he kept the idea of the actors' occasionally addressing the audience directly. Breaking the fourth wall, theater people call this. It's not entirely respectable, but McKay has taken a hammer and shattered the fourth wall. I don't think a more rigid or fearful creative person could have had anything like the success McKay has had in getting across the essence of Wall Street.

(3) A total absence of intellectual insecurity. McKay claims to have been a pompous kid, by which he means, I think, he once quoted Céline. Whatever pomposity he had in him has been ground out of him. Finance, as it has grown more complex, almost demands pretention from anyone who tries to explain it. It takes a fierce creative will to come to grips with financial jargon and still resist the temptation to join The Club of People Who Understand Financial Jargon. Whatever else he isn't, McKay is clearly not clubbable. He's worked hard to understand Wall Street. But rather than use that understanding as evidence of his own intellectual sophistication he has insisted, almost ruthlessly, on making his understanding comprehensible to others.

"Treat your audience like poets and geniuses and that's what they'll become," Del Close once said to McKay, who obviously took it to heart. He isn't all that concerned that you think he's smart, but he's obviously very concerned that you leave his movie feeling smart. That simple impulse has enabled him to make a movie so important that even the author can't complain about it. □

50 Years of *Solitude*



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 122 the black people's huts surviving in wretchedness. . . . The terrible world of Yoknapatawpha County had passed in front of our eyes from the window of a bus," he would remember, "and it was as true and as human as in the novels of the old master."

García Márquez struggled. He turned to screenwriting. He edited a glossy women's magazine, *La Familia,* and another specializing in scandal and crime. He wrote copy for J. Walter Thompson. In the Zona Rosa—Mexico City's Left Bank—he was known as surly and morose.

And then his life changed. A literary agent in Barcelona had taken an interest in his work, and after a week of meetings in New York in 1965 she headed south to meet him.

A Sheet of Paper

"This interview is a fraud," Carmen Balcells declared with conversation-ending finality. We were in her apartment above the offices of Agencia Carmen Balcells, in the center of Barcelona. In a wheelchair, she had rolled out to meet me at the elevator and then spun the wheelchair to a giant table laden with manuscripts and red file boxes. (VARGAS LLOSA, read the label on one; WYLIE AGENCY, another.) Eighty-five, with thick white hair, she had the formidable size and bearing that led her to be called La Mamá Grande. She wore a capacious white dress that suggested a resemblance to a female Pope.

"A fraud," she said in English, in a high, small voice. "When a celebrity, or an artist—when this person dies and is no [longer] there to answer many things, the first move is to interview the secretaries, the hairdresser, doctors, wives, children, tailor. I am not an artist. I am an agent. I am here as a person who really had an importance in Gabriel García Márquez's life. But this—it is not the real thing. The magnificent presence of the artist is missing."

Balcells was preparing for a future she would not be present to see. A deal to sell her business to the New York literary agent Andrew Wylie had recently come apart. (More on this later.) Now other suitors were making their entreaties, and Balcells was trying to decide who would look after her 300-plus clients, the estate of García Márquez chief among them. Our interview, she told me wearily, would be followed by a meeting with her lawyers—"a dirty business," she said.

That afternoon, grandiloquently alive, she pushed such matters aside and recalled the day she first felt "the magnificent presence of the artist" near at hand.

She and her husband, Luis, liked to read in bed. "I was reading García Márquez—one of the early books—and I said to Luis, 'This is so fantastic, Luis, that we have to read it at the same time.' So I made a copy of it. We both had enthusiasm for it: it was so fresh, so original, so exciting. Every reader says in his mind, of certain books, 'This is one of the best books I have ever read.' When that happens to a book again and again, all over the world, you have a masterpiece. That is what happened with Gabriel García Márquez."

When Balcells and Luis arrived in Mexico City, in July 1965, García Márquez met not just his new agent but two people who were intimate with his work. In the daytime, he showed them the city; nights, they all had supper together with local writers. They ate and drank, and ate and drank some more. And then García Márquez, having fully warmed to his guests, took out a sheet of paper, and with Luis as a witness he and Balcells drew up a contract declaring her his repre-

sentative in all the world for the next 150 years.

"Not a hundred and fifty—I think a hundred and twenty," Balcells told me, smiling. "It was a joke, a spoof contract, you see."

But there was another contract, and it was no joke. In New York the week before, Balcells had found a U.S. publisher—Harper & Row—for García Márquez's work. She'd made a deal for the English-language rights to his four books. The payment? A thousand dollars. She had brought the contract, which she presented for him to sign.

The terms seemed onerous, even rapacious. And the contract also gave Harper & Row the first option to bid on his *next* work of fiction, whatever it was. "This contract is a piece of shit," he told her. He signed anyway.

Balcells left to return to Barcelona; García Márquez set out with his family for a beach vacation in Acapulco, a day's drive south. Partway there, he stopped the car—a white 1962 Opel with a red interior—and turned back. His next work of fiction had come to him all at once. For two decades he had been pulling and prodding at the tale of a large family in a small village. Now he could envision it with the clarity of a man who, standing before a firing squad, saw his whole life in a single moment. "It was so ripe in me," he would later recount, "that I could have dictated the first chapter, word by word, to a typist."

In the study, he settled himself at the typewriter. "I did not get up for eighteen months," he would recall. Like the book's protagonist, Colonel Aureliano Buendía—who hides out in his workshop in Macondo, fashioning tiny gold fish with jeweled eyes—the author worked obsessively. He marked the typed pages, then sent them to a typist who made a fresh copy. He called friends to read pages aloud. Mercedes maintained the family. She stocked the cupboard with scotch for when work was done. She kept bill collectors at bay. She hocked household items for cash: "telephone, fridge, radio, jewelry," as García Márquez's biographer Gerald Martin has it. He sold the Opel. When the novel was finished, and Gabo and Mercedes went to the post office to send the typescript to the publisher, Editorial Sudamericana, in Buenos Aires, they didn't have the 82 pesos for the postage. They sent the first half, and then the rest after a visit to the pawnshop.

He had smoked 30,000 cigarettes and run through 120,000 pesos (about $10,000). Mercedes asked, "And what if, after all this, it's a bad novel?"

Mind on Fire

"The past is never dead. It's not even past," Faulkner observed, and with *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* García Márquez made the presence of the past a condition of life in Macondo—like poverty, or injustice. Over seven generations José Arcadio Buendía and his descendants are relentlessly present to one another: in their inherited names, their fits of anger and jealousy, their feuds and wars, their nightmares, and in the current of incest that runs through them—a force that makes family resemblance a curse and sexual attraction a force to be resisted, lest you and your lover (who is also your cousin) produce a child with a pig's tail.

"Magic realism" became the term for García Márquez's violation of natural laws through art. And yet the magic of the novel, first and last, is in the power with which it makes the Buendías and their neighbors present to the reader. Reading it, you feel: They are alive; this happened.

Eight thousand copies sold in the first week in Argentina alone, unprecedented for a literary novel in South America. Laborers read it. So did housekeepers and professors—and prostitutes: the novelist Francisco Goldman recalls seeing the novel on the bedside table in a coastal bordello. García Márquez traveled to Argentina, to Peru, to Venezuela, on its behalf. In Caracas, he had his hosts stick up a handwritten sign: TALK OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SOLITUDE FORBIDDEN. Women offered themselves to him—in person and in photographs.

To avoid distractions, he moved his family to Barcelona. Pablo Neruda, meeting him there, wrote a poem about him. At the University of Madrid, Mario Vargas Llosa, already acclaimed for his novel *The Green House,* wrote a doctoral dissertation about García Márquez's book, which was awarded top literary prizes in Italy and France. It was seen as the first book to unify the Spanish-language literary culture, long divided between Spain and Latin America, city and village, colonizers and colonized.

Gregory Rabassa bought the book in Manhattan and read it straight through, enthralled. A professor of Romance languages at Queens College, he had recently translated Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*—and had won a National Book Award for it. He'd served as a code breaker for the Office of Strategic Services during the war; he'd danced with Marlene Dietrich when she entertained the troops. He knew the real thing when he saw it.

"I read it without any thought of translating it," he explains, sitting in his apartment on East 72nd Street. Now 93, frail but mentally agile, he still attends reunions of surviving O.S.S. spies. "I was used to tried-and-true methods of storytelling. Oh . . . I'd done Cortázar. I knew [the work of] Borges. You put the two together and you got something else: you got Gabriel García Márquez."

Harper & Row's editor in chief, Cass Canfield Jr., having paid $1,000 for the previous four books, got an approval for $5,000 for the new novel, to be paid to the Balcells agency in installments. García Márquez asked his friend Julio Cortázar to recommend a translator. "Get Rabassa," Cortázar told him.

In 1969, at a house in Hampton Bays, on Long Island, Rabassa set to translating the novel, beginning with its unforgettable triple-time first sentence: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." He established certain rules: "I had to make sure the patriarch was always José Arcadio Buendía, never any truncated version, much the way that Charlie Brown is never called anything but Charlie Brown in 'Peanuts.'"

Editor Richard Locke had first heard about the book in 1968 from novelist Thomas McGuane, while on a trip to visit him in Montana. "Tom was extremely well read," says Locke. "He said this was the guy everybody was talking about." By the time Harper & Row sent out advance proofs, in early 1970, Locke had become an assigning editor at *The New York Times Book Review.* "When the novel came in, I realized it was a very important book," Locke remembers, "by a very different kind of writer—and in a new form that we had never seen before. And I gave it an enthusiastic report."

Canfield, meanwhile, had sung its song to a *Times* reporter, and there appeared a preview of all the new Latin-American literature coming into English—El Boom—with García Márquez at the head of the line. "We are certain that García Márquez will cause the same sensation as some of the postwar French and German writers brought to the American literary scene," Canfield predicted.

One Hundred Years of Solitude was published in March 1970, its lush-green jacket and understated typography concealing the passion within. Then, as now, the key reviews for sales and prizes were those of the *Times.* The *Book Review* praised it as "a South American Genesis, an earthy piece of enchantment." John Leonard, in the daily *Times,* held nothing back: "You emerge from this marvelous novel as if from a dream, the mind on fire." He concluded, "With a single bound, Gabriel García Márquez leaps onto the stage with Günter Grass and Vladimir Nabokov, his appetite as enormous as his imagination, his fatalism greater than either. Dazzling."

Signed up for $5,000 on the basis of a "piece of shit" contract, the book would sell 50 million copies worldwide, becoming a year-in-year-out fixture on the backlist. Gregory Rabassa watched with mingled pride and unease as his work—paid for in a lump sum "of about a thousand dollars," like the work of a gardener "spreading manure on a suburban lawn"—became at once the most acclaimed novel in translation and the most popular. García Márquez himself read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in the Harper & Row edition and pronounced it better than his Spanish original. He called Rabassa "the best Latin American writer in the English language."

The Altercation

Many have entertained the notion of making a movie of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* None has come close. Sometimes author and agent named an astronomical sum for the rights. Other times García Márquez set fantasti-

cal terms. Gabo told Harvey Weinstein that he would grant him and Giuseppe Tornatore the rights, provided the movie was made his way. As Weinstein would recall: "We must film the entire book, but only release one chapter—two minutes long—each year, for one hundred years."

Instead of adaptations, then, there have been homages by other novelists—some explicit (Oscar Hijuelos's highly amplified novels of Cuban America), others indirect and furtive (William Kennedy's *Ironweed,* in which a dead child speaks to his father from the grave). Alice Walker bent the iron bars of plausibility in *The Color Purple,* where letters sent to God elicit real replies. Isabel Allende, a relative of the slain Chilean president (and herself a Balcells client), told the story of modern Chile through a family saga in *The House of the Spirits.*

"I was sitting in my office at Random House," says Toni Morrison, then an editor with two of her own novels published, "just turning the pages of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* There was something so familiar about the novel, so recognizable to me. It was a certain kind of freedom, a structural freedom, a [different] notion of a beginning, middle, and end. Culturally, I felt intimate with him because he was happy to mix the living and the dead. His characters were on intimate terms with the supernatural world, and that's the way stories were told in my house."

Morrison's father had died, and she had in mind a new novel, whose protagonists would be men—a departure for her. "I had hesitated before writing about those guys. But now, because I had read *One Hundred Years of Solitude,* I did not hesitate. I got permission from García Márquez"—permission to write *Song of Solomon,* the first of a run of big, bold novels. (Many years later, Morrison and García Márquez taught a master class together at Princeton. It was 1998—"the year Viagra came out," Morrison recalls. "I would pick him up in the morning at the hotel where he and Mercedes were staying, and he said, 'The *peell:* the *peell* is not for us men. It is for you, for you women. We do not need it, but we want to please you!'")

John Irving was teaching literature and coaching wrestling at Windham College, in Vermont, an Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate in thrall to Günter Grass. Like *The Tin Drum,* García Márquez's book struck him with its old-fashioned breadth and confidence. "Here's a guy who's a 19th-century storyteller but who's working *now,*" says Irving. "He creates characters and makes you love them. When he writes about the supernatural, it's extraordinary, not ordinary. The incest and intermarriage . . . it's pre-destined, like in Hardy."

Junot Díaz, a generation younger, sees Gabo as a guide to current realities. Díaz read the novel in his first months at Rutgers, in 1988. "The world went from black-and-white to Technicolor," he says. "I was a young Latino-American-Caribbean writer desperately looking for models. This novel went through me like a lightning bolt: it entered through the crown of my head and went right down to my toes, redounding through me for the next several decades—up to right now." He was struck by the fact that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had been written just after his own homeland, the Dominican Republic, was invaded by U.S. troops in 1965, and he came to see magic realism as a political tool—one "that enables Caribbean people to see things clearly in their world, a surreal world where there are more dead than living, more erasure and silence than things spoken." He explains: "There are seven generations of the Buendía family. We are the eighth generation. We are the children of Macondo."

Salman Rushdie was living in London and thinking about the country of his childhood when he first read the book. Many years later he wrote, "I knew García Márquez's colonels and generals, or at least their Indian and Pakistani counterparts; his bishops were my mullahs; his market streets were my bazaars. His world was mine, translated into Spanish. It's little wonder I fell in love with it—not for its magic . . . but for its realism." Reviewing García Márquez's novel *Chronicle of a Death Foretold,* Rushdie summarized the novelist's fame with the controlled hyperbole he and Gabo had in common: "The news of a new Márquez book takes over the front pages of the Spanish-American dailies. Barrow boys hawk copies in the streets. Critics commit suicide for lack of fresh superlatives." Rushdie called him "Angel Gabriel," an offhand gesture that suggests García Márquez's influence on *The Satanic Verses,* whose protagonist is called the Angel Gibreel.

By then, Gabo was a Nobel laureate. He had a new U.S. publisher, Knopf. And in a rare stroke, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* was published in full in the premiere issue of the revived *Vanity Fair,* in 1983, where Richard Locke had taken the editor's chair. Locke and Alexander Liberman, Condé Nast's editorial director, had commissioned accompanying artwork by Botero, the Colombian portraitist. The admiration for the author was universal. He was the laureate everyone could love.

Everyone, that is, except Mario Vargas Llosa. They'd been friends for years: Latin-American expats in Barcelona, prominent writers of El Boom, clients of Carmen Balcells'. Their wives—Mercedes and Patricia—socialized. Then they had a falling-out. In 1976, in Mexico City, García Márquez attended a screening of the film *La Odisea de los Andes,* for which Vargas Llosa had written the script. Spotting his friend, García Márquez went to embrace him. Vargas Llosa punched him in the face, knocking him down and giving him a black eye.

"And García Márquez said, 'Now that you've punched me to the ground, why don't you tell me why,'" Balcells told me, recalling the episode. Ever since, literary people in Latin America have wondered why. One story is that García Márquez had told a mutual friend that he found Patricia less than beautiful. A second is that Patricia, suspecting that Mario was having an affair, had asked Gabo what she should do about it, and Gabo had told her to leave him. Vargas Llosa has said only that it was "about a personal problem."

"Another writer said to Mario, 'Be careful,'" Balcells recalled. "'You don't want to be known as the man who clocked the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.*'"

For four decades, Vargas Llosa has categorically refused to discuss the episode, and he has said that he and Gabo made a "pact" to take the story to their graves. But in a recent conversation about his friend and rival, Vargas Llosa—himself a Nobel laureate—spoke affectionately and at length about what García Márquez has meant to him, from his first encounter with Gabo's fiction (in Paris, and in French translation) to their first meeting, at the Caracas airport, in 1967, to their years as boon companions in Barcelona, to their plan to write a novel together about the 1828 war between Peru and Colombia. And he spoke about *Cien Años de Soledad,* which he read and wrote about "immediately, immediately" when it reached him in Cricklewood, North London, a few weeks after publication. "This was the book that enlarged the Spanish-language reading public to include intellectuals and also ordinary readers because of its clear and transparent style. At the same time, it was a very representative book: Latin America's civil wars, Latin America's inequalities, Latin America's imagination, Latin America's love of music, its color—all this was in a novel in which realism and fantasy were mixed in a perfect way." About his falling-out with Gabo he kept his silence, saying, "That is a secret for a future biographer."

Perfect Marriage

Carmen Balcells will be known always as the agent who represented the author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* She met me in Barcelona, with the understanding that she would be speaking as the one who, in the title of Gabo's own memoir, was still "living to tell the tale."

Our encounter, as it turned out, would take a Márquezian twist. We were at the giant table in the sala, like a classic six on Park Avenue. A portrait made of Balcells many years earlier was hung on one wall—the same darting eyes, the same strong jaw—and it was as if the younger Balcells were present, too, witnessing the long story of the agent's relationship with her writer. It has been called "*un matrimonio perfecto.*"

I told her that I had worked as an editor with Farrar, Straus and Giroux. "Aha!," she exclaimed. "I have a photographic memory for faces, you see, and it must be that I saw your face when I was there to see Roger [Straus, the publisher]. You have the same face you had then!

"Because I met you, you can ask me anything you want," she went on, and we talked for an hour and a half. Ever the agent, she attached provisos to the conversation. She told me ("but not for your article") what it was that prompted Mario to slug Gabo that night in 1976. She explained ("but you must promise not to publish until I die") how she had leveraged *One Hundred Years of Solitude* again and again to "make a secret deal" with its publishers worldwide, granting them the rights to new books only on condition that they amended their individual contracts for Gabo's book—so that rights to it would revert back to the agency.

She spoke without proviso about the state of the agency. "I retired in the year 2000," she said. "The business was with three associates: my son, the man who does the contracts, [and another]. But I had to return because of the debts, the losses." She described her dealings with the most powerful agent in the English-speaking world: "Andrew Wylie is one of the persons who has wanted to buy my agency for 20 years. It should have been done six months ago. Andrew was here with Sarah [Chalfant, his deputy], and with a publisher who has become an agent . . . " She shook her head, unable to recall the name of Cristóbal Pera, who ran Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial in Mexico before joining Wylie in August.

In May 2014, Agencia Carmen Balcells entered into a memorandum of understanding with the Wylie Agency about an eventual sale, and the *Times* reported the deal as all but done. Balcells clearly trusted Wylie enough to have taken things that far. So why wasn't the deal done? Because, Balcells said, she surmised that Wylie anticipated closing the office on the Diagonal in Barcelona and folding the Balcells agency into his operations in New York and London. This she was strongly against. So she began entertaining other offers: from the London-based literary agent Andrew Nurnberg, who represents authors ranging from Harper Lee to Tariq Ali (as well as the late Jackie Collins), and from Riccardo Cavallero, who previously ran Mondadori in Italy and Spain.

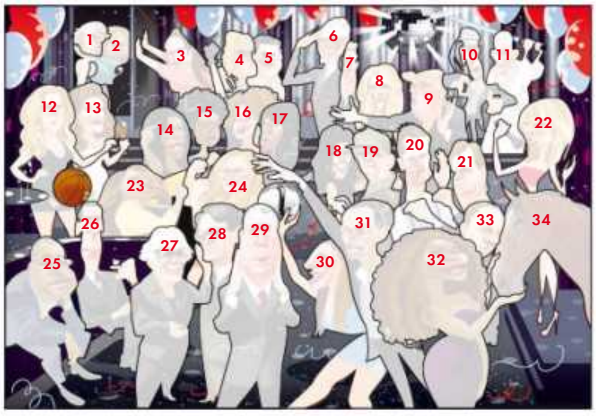
"Three offers, all very interesting," she told me. "But the process is frozen, because none of them was good enough." In a little while the lawyers would arrive and she and they would try to sort things out. She articulated her greatest fear: betraying her authors, should the needs of a new agency partner supersede the needs of individual writers. "To be a literary agent: it's a modest job," she said. "But it's a job that's important for the writer. It's a position that you take the right decision for your clients. And the problem is that the ego [of the agents] can get in the way. It's very important that the agency is a person, one person. It's not about money."

What *was* it about? Andrew Wylie won't talk about their discussions. So Balcells' word may be the last word. For her, it was also about something else—about the agent as a presence in the lives of her authors, and as a person who would be there when what she called "the magnificent presence of the author" was no more.

Rolling gracefully in her wheelchair, she showed me to the elevator. She kissed my hand in parting. Seven weeks later, she died of a heart attack, stricken in that Barcelona apartment. Despite her advanced years, her death took the publishing community by surprise. And with her passing she would become, like her magical author, altogether present, a specter that haunts the fight for her agency—and Gabo's legacy.

Who will represent *One Hundred Years of Solitude*? Right now, no one knows. But the Buendías and their village, Macondo, are ably represented: we are their descendants, and they are present to us, as vivid as a swarm of yellow butterflies in the pages of Gabriel García Márquez's magnificent novel. □

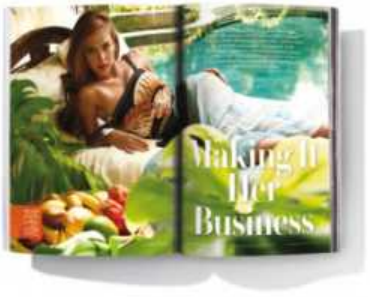
Last Call, 2015 (See page 110)



KEY (1) Bernie Sanders, (2) Hillary Clinton, (3) Kim Davis, (4) Joyce Mitchell, (5) El Chapo, (6) David Letterman, (7) Jon Stewart, (8) Megyn Kelly, (9) Donald Trump, (10) Brian Williams, (11) Pope Francis, (12) Amy Schumer, (13) Caitlyn Jenner, (14) Uzo Aduba, (15) Viola Davis, (16) Rachel Dolezal, (17) Regina King, (18) Kourtney Kardashian, (19) Raúl Castro, (20) Tom Brady, (21) Roger Goodell, (22) Taylor Swift, (23) Toya Graham, (24) Ronda Rousey, (25) Ben Carson, (26) Don Draper, (27) Harper Lee, (28) Atticus Finch, (29) John Boehner, (30) Carli Lloyd, (31) Stephen Curry, (32) Serena Williams, (33) Jordan Spieth, and (34) American Pharoah.

KEY BY JASON LEE. ILLUSTRATION BY ANDRÉ CARRILHO

Jessica Alba



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 118 she washed her unborn baby's onesies with a detergent her mother had recommended and broke out in hives, she was hysterical. "I was thinking, what if my baby has a reaction and I don't know? What if her throat is closing? I had all this fear and anxiety because I was always so sick as a child." That night she Googled every ingredient and discovered that some toxins can be labeled as "fragrance." Her mission was clear: "I wanted safe and effective consumer products that were beautifully designed, accessibly priced, and easy to get." Great idea, but how to implement it?

Alba hired author Christopher Gavigan (husband of actress Jessica Capshaw)—whose book, *Healthy Child Healthy World,* addresses the numerous toxins that children are exposed to in typical household products on a daily basis—to consult on Love & Honor, the original name of her company. At the same time, she began her research: she discovered that in the U.S. the F.D.A. has banned fewer than a dozen harmful chemicals, whereas in Europe more than 1,300 chemicals are deemed unsafe for household products. In 2011 she appeared on Capitol Hill to ask members of Congress to cosponsor the Safe Chemicals Act.

By the time Alba had a second daughter, Haven, in 2011, her company was still not off the ground. Her husband introduced her to his childhood pal Brian Lee, a start-up entrepreneur who co-founded LegalZoom.com (which was sold to Permira, an investment firm, for $200 million in 2014). He passed on her idea. Two other potential investor deals fell through as well, but Alba was undeterred. "Actresses are used to rejection," she explains.

Eighteen months later Lee had a baby of his own, and when his wife started manically researching their household cleaners he saw a need in the marketplace. By then Alba had refined her concept and changed the company name to Honest. "In the time between the first and second meeting, my wife had changed our whole life. Jessica's goal to make safer products for the family resonated with me." Finally convinced, Lee brought on Sean Kane from PriceGrabber.com to be the president and co-

Jessica Alba

founder, and, with Alba and Gavigan, Honest's own Fantastic Four was formed. "We are a mission business," Lee says. "Our mission is to make safer homes for everyone."

In 2012, the company's first year, sales reached $10 million. It launched with only 17 products, in the diapers-and-wipes category, all of which were delivered to subscribers' homes on a monthly basis, or à la carte. "Running out of diapers? That's a parent's nightmare," Alba says. This year, with more than 135 products (toothpaste, nipple balm, vitamins, detergent, etc.) sold both online and in 4,400 retail stores, plus the fall launch of HonestBeauty.com, sales passed $150 million. The company weathered its first crisis, in June. It was accused in a class-action suit of selling an ineffective new product, a sunblock. "We learned we need to get in front of our product with education," says Alba, and adds that Honest will organize a safe-sun tutorial next year. Last year's Series D financing round raised $100 million, certifying Honest as a "start-up unicorn," the term the tech industry applies to companies that reach a $1 billion valuation in less than five years. (Honest did it with two years to spare.) The company launched in Korea in 2015 and is planning to move into a number of international markets.

Honest's success has given Alba a platform that her work in movies didn't. Of her first trip down the Academy Awards red carpet, in 2006, she remembers thinking, "If I talk to anyone for too long they're going to know I don't belong here." Now she's not so worried. "I stopped caring about people liking me so much." When I ask how she splits her time between being a successful businesswoman and a good parent, she shoots back, "Let me ask you something: how many men get asked that question?"

Warren says Alba's confidence has replaced her insecurity about never having attended college. "This is the first time she knows she's smart. She wakes up thinking about Honest; she goes to bed thinking about it." Last year, she was on the covers of *Shape* and *Forbes* magazines at the same time, the latter of which had a headline that read: AMERICA'S RICHEST SELF-MADE WOMEN. (The article claimed that Alba is worth $200 million and owns between 15 and 20 percent of Honest, though she quickly declines to confirm any personal finances or financials of the company.)

"When someone asks if there's a company that I didn't invest in that I wish I had, I always say Honest," says Kirsten Green, a venture capitalist at FourRunner, which invests in the brands Bonobos, Warby Parker, and Reformation. Green says Alba has redefined the celebrity business model, distancing it from a famous person's unattainable aspiration and replacing it with a real connection to consumers. Celebrities need to do more than just pose with a product, and many of them—such as Reese Witherspoon, who started the company Draper James, which Green has invested in—are eager to follow Alba's lead.

A few weeks after my office tour, Alba is navigating through West Hollywood's back streets to get us to the Grove, a posh outdoor mall where she's setting up an Honest pop-up shop. It's the company's first stand-alone space, and Alba wants to test the waters of brick-and-mortar retail. Behind the Peninsula hotel, Alba points out her first apartment and recalls her early days as an entrepreneur. "If it was easy, everyone would do it. You have to be a little bit crazy; you have to have gumption and tenacity. A lot of people give up at the first roadblock. But, for entrepreneurs, if there isn't another road, we create it. We break concrete; we throw dynamite; we figure it out."

We arrive at the Grove, and Alba is in boss mode again. She questions the placement of the artwork and uses a rag to clean off a display. "What about uniforms?" she wonders. It's decided that all-white uniforms would look like cruise staff and all-black are "too Sephora," so she settles on a denim-on-denim. Her next stop is Sprinkles cupcakes, to confirm that gluten-free treats will be on hand at the opening party. On her way out, she notices that posters promoting the pop-up aren't facing the right way. Without missing a beat, she tosses down her purse and starts lugging the signs herself. Do you think Steve Jobs would've done that?, I ask her. "I don't know," she says as her face explodes into a big Hollywood smile. "But I'm doing this my way." □

Chris Hemsworth



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 91 there's little ambivalence in him. Ron Howard on Hemsworth's audition tape for *Rush* (2013):

"He'd made it himself in his hotel room when he was shooting one of the *Avengers* movies. He was huge. There's no way he could even fit in the car [the part was real-life race-car driver James Hunt]. But at the end, in his Aussie voice, he said, 'And don't worry. I'll be whatever size Hunt needs to be.' At that moment, I knew we had our guy."

So Hemsworth *wants* to work, is eager. He doesn't play the tortured artiste. Which doesn't mean he isn't, in his own way, tortured (no chance a person who holds himself to such exacting standards is short on demons) or an artiste. He makes it all look easy, though, because that's *his* aim and point and declaration—no sweat, nothing to it, Gary Cooper, super duper.

Hemsworth appears to work from the outside in. His body is always in character: as Thor, he moves like a heavyweight who's light on his feet; as the Huntsman, in *Snow White and the Huntsman,* he moves with a swashbuckler's authoritative grace; and as the hacker in Michael Mann's *Blackhat,* he practically doesn't move at all, is, for large portions of the film, utterly still except for his fingers, agile and precise and flying across the keyboard, and for his eyes, darty with panic.

It's no surprise then that Ron Howard cast him as the lead in this month's *In the Heart of the Sea,* based on Nathaniel Philbrick's National Book Award–winning account of the whaleship *Essex,* the sinking of which would inspire *Moby-Dick.* The movie is a lot of things, including a story of Man vs. Nature (really, it's no contest, Nature kicks the shit out of Man, having had it up to here with Man and Man's antics)—says Howard, "When we were making it, I told everybody, This isn't *Jaws,* think more *King Kong*"—but mostly it's an old-fashioned adventure picture, Hemsworth's role as first mate Owen Chase requiring a frank un-ironic heroism, which so few actors can pull off these days.

In person, Hemsworth is sunny, laid-back, polite, without pretense. He's part of an industry that's, in his words, "set up to turn you into a complete narcissist." Not that he's going to let it. He has three children with wife Elsa Pataky: daughter India Rose, three, and twin sons Tristan and Sasha, one. They help combat the narcissism. Hemsworth recently moved his family from Malibu to Australia's Byron Bay to shake the L.A. paparazzi, but also to shake L.A. generally. The city's a company town and can mess with your head without even trying. I'd looked out the window of my Sunset Strip hotel that morning. It was billboards as far as the eye could see, all of them hawking a movie or a series. Says Hemsworth, "You just kind of lose touch with reality a bit here. You drive down the street and you're constantly reminded of everything you're either involved in or not involved in. It's exhausting."

Movie Star qua Movie Star

So Hemsworth's a model of decency and modesty and good humor in a context in which those virtues barely stand a chance. But—and I hate even to suggest it, curse my forked tongue, etc.—could these very virtues be what are holding him back? Which is another way of asking, Is Chris Hemsworth

really a movie star? The answer to the question is, on the one hand: Hell yeah, he's a movie star! He's part of three highly profitable franchises; works with top-of-the-A-List A-List directors; was *People*'s 2014 Sexiest Man Alive; a host with the most on *S.N.L.* So all the major boxes are checked.

But, on the other hand: Not so fast. Maybe it isn't as simple as checked boxes.

Let's talk, for a minute, about *Rush,* the movie Hemsworth was auditioning for in that hotel room. It may be his best. Certainly James Hunt, the 1970s Formula One driver with all the right moves, is his best role. *Rush* is a love story disguised as a hate story, the central relationship between a pair of rivals who regard each other with the maniacal intensity of soul mates. James Hunt vs. Niki Lauda—beauty vs. beast, hot vs. cool, id vs. super-ego.

There's a twist, though: Hunt may have the flashy looks and babes and lifestyle. Hunt, however, is not the flashy part. Lauda, who's ugly and knows it, who's unlikable and knows it, is the character who captures the director's imagination. And the actor who played him, Daniel Brühl, captured the awards. Yet what Hemsworth did is, arguably, even more difficult: he makes an unsympathetic guy sympathetic. (Hunt's got it all, so why should he get the audience's sympathy as well?) Hemsworth lets you see the sweetness beneath Hunt's macho posturing, and the melancholy. And, yes, Hunt's a stud, bedding miniskirted cuties singly and in pairs, but he's every bit as much a gentleman. You just know he wants the girls to have a good time too! And same as Hemsworth's Hunt is a generous lover, Hemsworth is a generous actor. He serves his co-star and hits his marks and never camera-hogs.

The empathy issue was a major one for Hemsworth: "Ron and Peter [Morgan, the screenwriter] and I tried to thread throughout the idea that Hunt's behavior is fueled by adrenaline and fear and insecurity. And then the one scene that I think really was a tipping point in our favor to making him redeemable—and it wasn't in the original script—was when he punched the reporter." The punch—multiple punches, actually—came after said reporter, in wildly dickish fashion, asked a nearly-burned-alive Lauda how his wife could stand looking at him. For me, it was the worst scene in the movie—a blatant attempt to manipulate the audience, shove it onto Hunt's side. But Hemsworth was gung-ho. Here's what that tells me: that he isn't yet fully in control of his persona, and that he doesn't yet trust his rapport with the audience. (You play a villain or an asshole and the audience loves you anyway? You're a star.)

Which brings me back to Hemsworth's decency, modesty, and good humor being a hindrance. If he were *more* self-obsessed, *more* self-adoring, *more* self-whatever, he'd likely be a shrewder calculator of his own power, and would know how far the viewer was willing to go with him. (Answer: far.) Besides, for a movie star to truly earn the title, he or she has to impose his or her personality on a film, become a phenomenon: Tom Cruise as the fighter pilot with the bulletproof grin in *Top Gun;* Julia Roberts as the whore you can take home to Mom in *Pretty Woman;* Brad Pitt as the drifter who drifted off with not only sweet, love-struck Geena Davis's cash (a villain *and* an asshole) but the movie in *Thelma & Louise.* Channing Tatum had his star turn when he gyrated his red-thonged pelvis to Ginuwine's "Pony" for fun and profit in the semi-autobiographical *Magic Mike* (2012). Hemsworth, though, hasn't yet had his.

A possibly to-the-point aside: the one moment in our three-hour conversation that Hemsworth's voice took on a wistful note was when Jennifer Lawrence's name came up. He was talking about how nutzoid the paparazzi can get, quickly adding, "But I'm not complaining!," a sentence he uttered so often it became a kind of refrain. Then he laughed. "What was it that Jennifer Lawrence said? 'I know everyone says you're not supposed to complain about the paparazzi. Well, I don't give a shit. I'm fucking complaining!' " He cut off his laugh to sigh. "But she can get away with that."

He's right. She can. Why? Well, for one thing, Lawrence is a beyond-dispute movie star: a franchise that's hers all hers, plus an Academy Award. She's more than that, though. While movie star is still the most desirable kind of famous, it's no longer the most famous kind of famous. The most famous kind of famous is what I think of as personality famous. People who are famous for, above all else, being themselves; people who either don't grasp or ignore the distinction between public life and private; people who are reality stars no matter if they're another type of star as well. Here's a list, partial, of the personality famous: Kim Kardashian; Caitlyn Jenner—actually, pretty much the entire Kardashian-Jenner clan; Miley Cyrus (Liam's ex-fiancée); Justin Bieber; Gigi Hadid; Teen Moms with sex tapes and Housewives who are Real; Kanye, though I suppose he falls under the rubric of Kardashian now; the cast of *Jersey Shore;* Taylor Swift.

Lawrence's name is also on the list, and here's why: She doesn't play the game. Isn't forever trying to prove herself deserving of her success. Doesn't come on humble or grateful. On the contrary, she gets pissy, has moods, loses her temper. Acts naturally, in other words.

I'd like to add this too: while Lawrence isn't the only genuine talent on the list—the list is mostly incandescent mediocrities, but not all—she is, however, the only movie star. And, really, she should come with a do-not-try-this-at-home warning label because she's pulling off something that shouldn't be pull-offable. (More on this shortly.)

End of aside.

ON THE COVER



Chris Hemsworth wears jeans by Rag & Bone. Hair products by Bumble and Bumble. Grooming products by Tom Ford. Hair by Jimmy Paul. Grooming by Regine Thorre. Set design by Dimitri Levas. Produced on location by Dawn Boller. Styled by Anne Christensen. Photographed exclusively for *V.F.* by Bruce Weber in Montauk, New York. For details, go to VF.com/credits.

Back now to on-the-other-hand. Except not. Forget on-the-other-hand because on-the-one-hand is right: Hell yeah, Hemsworth's a movie star! If he hasn't fully imposed himself yet, it's because he's been too busy establishing himself. And he appears to be using his superhero powers for good: "Being part of a franchise like *The Avengers* is the dream scenario. I've got this thing that's going to keep me relevant, and I can still explore other things in between, do a few films no one cares about." The "other things" include the new *Ghostbusters,* in which he's the token dude in an all-dudette cast. Says co-star Kristen Wiig, "Chris is so naturally funny. He was a joy to look at—I mean, work with, work with!" (Incidentally, *Vacation,* which wasn't one, which was an utter grind, except for Hemsworth, who had a cameo that was as impressive as the prosthetic penis he wore, i.e. very, very impressive.) And then there's the adaptation of Steve Earle's novel about Hank Williams's dope doctor, in which he's set not just to act but to produce.

In any case, Hemsworth's managing to establish himself as a star is plenty remarkable, since it's harder to become one now more than ever thanks to the iPhone and social media and the 24-hour news cycle. A star is, by its very nature, a remote entity, beautiful and inhuman, to be gazed upon but never touched or fathomed. Only these days, stars are all too human and fathomable—not to mention accessible. Getting caught by TMZ relieving yourself in a mop bucket as you exit a nightclub might not cost you Twitter followers, but it definitely does a number on your aura, your mystery, your iconographic power. (See what I mean about Lawrence and pulling off the un-pull-offable?)

So maybe Hemsworth, who for all his friendliness has a reserve about him, an air of privacy that does not invite intrusion, figured it right. Keep your distance, physical (move as far away from Hollywood as possible, preferably to another continent) and emotional (politeness can, in a pinch, be used as a barrier). And in a few years, you'll be the only star that hasn't fallen, will have the heavens all to yourself. □

Bahamas Battle



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 109 refer to Bacon's "heroism" for taking on "the neighborhood bully." "I'm probably the one who's been affected the most," Bacon says, "and I have the means to do something about it."

An Island Refuge

Lyford Cay was designed as a gated "winter community," the brainchild of the aforementioned E. P. Taylor and Sir Harold Christie, a scion of the Bahamian family that owned the original 3,000-acre plot at the western tip of New Providence. The houses have names that are playfully colonial: Tra La La, Safari, Tea Time, Out of Bounds. In 1962, when President Kennedy flew to Nassau for a series of private "world-ranging talks" with the British prime minister Harold Macmillan, he stayed at Taylor's house and the P.M. stayed next door. Early residents included Henry Ford II, Aga Khan IV, Prince Rainier III of Monaco, Huntington Hartford II, Babe Paley, "and certainly the most beautiful women and some of the most powerful men in the world," *Town & Country* reported in 1975, marveling at how the private telephone directory for 120 villas listed "Heinz and Menzies, Goulandris and Niarchos, McMahon and Mellon." The piece was accompanied by a lavish Slim Aarons photo spread.

Today's roster is sleepy by comparison: aside from Sean Connery (who, nearly a half-dozen James Bonds ago, shot *Thunderball* and several other films here), there are scores of semi-anonymous businessmen or their progeny. Bacon and Nygard's neighbors prefer to keep a low profile: Count and Countess de Ravenel, of France; the Brazilian re-insurance magnate Antonio Braga; Jane Lewis, wife of the English investor Joe Lewis. "It's quiet money," says David Laughlin, a New York financier (second-generation Lyford) and chairman of the Lyford Cay Club.

Long before the puddle, Nygard clashed stylistically with much of the Lyford Cay establishment. He threw a lot of parties and was always doing construction. He bought his house, a modest beach bungalow, in 1984 for $1.76 million. It is now a security booth and staff office for his estate. "In the early days, my dad would sit at the little kitchen counter in the window and do his designs on napkins," says his eldest daughter, Bianca, who works for the Nygard corporation. "He always said he would never be done."

Nygard initially joined the Lyford Cay Property Owners Association (L.C.P.O.A.), even though his lot's location at the tip of the peninsula meant that it was not deeded within the L.C.P.O.A. After a few years he stopped paying dues. "When you join or go into somebody else's house or the land, you need to obey their own rules; you need to conform to whatever their standards are," Nygard says. "I have my own life, you know? I never moved here to Nygard Cay because of Lyford Cay. I moved to Nygard Cay because it's the most beautiful property in the world, and it happened to be that to get to it I had to go through Lyford Cay."

The Lyford Cay Club—a golf-and-tennis facility with a majestically frayed pink clubhouse—is the social hub of the community, and according to members, Nygard was discouraged from applying by people who broached the matter on his behalf with the membership committee. "There is a formal process to get into Lyford," says Chris Brady, a lifelong member. (Brady's father, Nicholas Brady, was secretary of the Treasury under President George H. W. Bush.) "And it helps if you buy an expensive piece of land and you keep your bad behavior on the down low. But Nygard got off to a bad start." Nygard says he never tried to join the club, and also denies being a bully, adding, "Most of my relationships with the Lyford Cay community were pristine until Louis Bacon came and destroyed many of them. Many from Lyford Cay would celebrate their weddings, anniversaries, and other special events at Nygard Cay, or bring their V.I.P. guests over, including royalty from around the world."

Yet, Laughlin says, "When somebody comes in who's of a different character and doesn't make much of an effort to assimilate, some communities are better able to deal with that than others. At Lyford, there isn't a mechanism to deal with that kind of ostentatiousness. A lot of us in the old line viewed him as a curiosity. It's not in keeping with what we do here, but people went out there to look at it. I'm one of them."

So was the first President Bush, who struck up a friendship with Nygard after Nicholas Brady took him to Nygard Cay once to marvel at the place. For better or worse, says Bill Hunter, a former Lyford Cay Club chairman, "when you look toward Nygard's place at night from across the bay, it's like a cruise ship, all the lights and torches blazing. And around it, the adjacent properties are dark."

"From time to time I see the procession of people coming to his parties—motorcades full of these attractive girls," says Jean-Charles de Ravenel. "They're not parties the typical Lyford Cay family is having with their grandchildren. Listen, Lyford Cay is not St. Tropez."

Nygard's supporters say his parties do stand out, because they're full of people who wouldn't otherwise be in Lyford Cay. "He has poor kids and athletes out to his house every day," says his best friend, Carlos Mackey, who is the host of a sports program on local TV. "He's a philosopher, a visionary, a genius. But his heart's as big as Shamu the whale." Nygard is well known throughout the Bahamas for his financial support of the country's Olympic running squads, among many other charities. Wendall Jones, the publisher of *The Bahama Journal,* says, "The residents of Lyford Cay say they don't appreciate his flamboyance when what they don't like is the fact that he invites so many black people over. Peter Nygard is a force for good."

Bacon arrived next door at Point House in 1994. He paid $5.9 million, then over the next 15 years purchased two adjoining pieces of land for an additional $20 million. "They did of course warn me about my neighbor, but that's probably why the price was right," Bacon says. "He was a bit of a headache, but it was largely cordial at first." Nygard says he and Bacon—an odd couple if ever there was one—invited each other for drinks at their homes. They managed an agreement (via their groundskeepers) on choices of island ficus and bougainvillea to plant along the easement.

"I helped to save his life," Nygard says of the time Bacon and his property manager got marooned during a fishing expedition. "I had some of my boats out there. I was part of his search committee." Bacon relates the same incident, though he says that Nygard was most ungallant. "My wife called him, and he came over to our house. He started casing the joint, looking at it as a place to buy, and did nothing. They ended up getting somebody else to come find us." (Nygard says that Bacon's then wife was "most appreciative" and that he has "never been interested" in Bacon's house.)

In 2005, Nygard addressed his parking-overflow problem by laying down a 15-by-20-foot concrete slab—on Bacon's side of the property line. Bacon responded by suing Nygard and obtaining a court injunction to remove it. Two years later, Bacon dealt with his long-standing irritation with the noise from Nygard's parties by installing industrial-grade speakers at the edge of his land and pointing them at Nygard Cay at night. "We hired a sound consultant in the U.K. to see if we could somehow muffle the sound from Nygard's by emitting a counter-sound, but that proved terribly complicated, so we went and got four huge rock-concert speakers to play something loud in response," Bacon's architect, Peter Talty, says.

"It was horrible squawking sounds that would drive you out of your mind," says Eric Gibson, Nygard's former property manager. In a legal filing, Nygard's lawyer characterized them as "military-grade speakers" that "blared dangerous, pain-inducing sound waves toward Mr. Nygard's home."

"It was supposed to create white noise on my side, but that didn't work," Bacon says. "What it did to his side I wasn't really interested in."

There was also the matter of sand. "Nygard was dredging, moving inordinate quantities of sand to increase the size of his property," says Fred Smith, one of Bacon's lawyers. "It had been going on for years, but in 2009, around the time the fire burned down his house, it really got out of control. He had a suction dredge on a floating platform, to move sand onshore, going day and night." Some worried that in rebuilding Nygard Cay he would try to obtain permission to turn the property into a commercial resort or a stem-cell research facility. (For a while, he advertised it as a rental for $294,000 a week.) Nygard had mentioned in a letter to the prime minister that a stem-cell center on the island could provide employment for hundreds of Bahamians, but insists that he had no intention of building it at Nygard Cay.

Meanwhile, Lyford residents and the L.C.P.O.A. had been logging complaints with the government for years, even compiling aerial photographs that documented the expanding dimensions of Nygard's coastline thanks to a series of underwater, sand-collecting barriers—called groins—that jut out from the shoreline. In the time since Nygard began living there, his piece of land has grown from 3.25 acres to 6.1 acres.

Bahamian environmentalists employed by Save the Bays, an organization that Bacon and several other Lyford residents would later set up chiefly to combat Nygard, cite significant damage to the coastline—84,000 square meters of the seafloor that Nygard's dredging gambit destroyed, according to one study. "It's impossible for natural accretion to build a beach this size on a point," Romi Ferreira, a local ecologist and an attorney for the group, says, noting that Nygard's southern flank—on the bay side—constitutes an especially egregious addendum. Nygard says the accretion to his acreage was brought about by "a severe change in ocean currents" in the 1990s, and points to a study he commissioned that concluded his dredging had little impact on the coastline.

Years earlier, Nygard had obtained a government permit to redirect the sand. "The man has a multi-million-dollar yacht, and his marina was silted up," his lawyer in Nassau, Keod Smith, says. "Does Peter like the fact that his beach got bigger? Of course he does. But that wasn't why he did it." But in 2010, Nygard received distressing news from the prime minister's office. In a letter dated July 21, he was called out for the accumulation of land that came via his "strategic" renovation and was ordered to not only remove the structures he'd built on the Crown land—his marina, lagoon, barbecue pit, and volleyball court—but also "reinstate" the coastline. It would mean returning all that sand to the Bahamas' rightful seabed, shrinking his property back down to its original dimensions.

Battle Is Joined

That's when Nygard got mad. He sued the government. He took steps to sue the Lyford Cay Property Owners Association. He sued Bacon over the re-grading project that had created the puddle in the driveway three years earlier and demanded that his neighbor install a security gate where the driveway crosses the property line. Nygard dispatched workers in the middle of the night to remove the non-locking cast-iron gates from the entrance to Bacon's property, to rip up four sets of speed bumps on the portion of the driveway that cut through Bacon's land, and to cover the NO TURNAROUND: PRIVATE PROPERTY warning that was painted on the shared road, replacing it with the words NYGARD CAY. Right in Bacon's front yard!

Nygard is convinced that Bacon "orchestrated" all his problems with Lyford Cay and the government. He adds that all the land he's been mandated to return to the Bahamas had been unofficially leased to him. "They approved it by letter and after a while it sort of grandfathers itself in," he says.

He also blamed Bacon for an unflattering documentary that ran on the Canadian TV series *The Fifth Estate* in 2010, titled *Peter Nygard: Larger than Life.* Nygard has filed multiple lawsuits, and the CBC has removed the piece from the Internet. In court documents, Nygard called the reporting false and asserted that the most damning accusers had been paid off by Bacon, who calls Nygard's suspicions "baseless."

In the summer of 2010, 11 armed Bahamian police officers conducted a raid on Point House, during which Bacon's staff were searched and interrogated and his possessions—including pictures of his children—were photographed. "They searched the house for guns; there weren't any," Ian Levy, Bacon's property manager, says. "They confiscated the speakers. The policemen didn't wear nametags." Bacon was mortified and says the chief of police told him that the sergeant in charge of the raid had acted without authorization "and that Nygard had put him up to it." Nygard says that he and his guests had merely called the police because, that week, they were "exposed to intolerable screeching" from Bacon's speakers. Soon afterward, Bacon pulled his three youngest children out of school in Lyford Cay and requested that the 70-person offshore advisement desk that handles his client records be moved out of the Bahamas. "It wasn't vengeance," he says. "I had to move the business as a fiduciary. People were worried about the security of our investors' information."

Nygard kept going. People he employed posted an elaborate series of YouTube videos and launched fake news Web sites—with names such as Bahamas Citizen and Bahamas National—devoted to ruining Bacon's name. They featured unsubstantiated assertions that Bacon ran an international drug-smuggling operation, was a member of the K.K.K., had been charged in "one of the biggest Wall Street insider trading cases ever" (a CBS News clip on Raj Gupta's infamous case had been altered, with Bacon's name spliced in to replace Gupta's), and was involved in murdering the Point House caretaker, Dan Tuckfield (who had died of a heart attack in the estate's hot tub), after commissioning him to set the fire at Nygard Cay. Other postings accused Bacon of taking credit for the efforts of local activists when he accepted the Audubon Medal for preserving Clifton Bay in 2013, and called his acceptance speech, which jokingly cited *Gone with the Wind,* racist. Nygard doesn't deny his participation in the campaign. "It's not actually my product in terms of my invention," he says, giving credit to his lawyer Keod Smith, an activist who has served in the Bahamian parliament. "But I agree with it." Has he bankrolled it? "I might have done that. I've been very supportive." Besides, he's not afraid of a $100 million defamation suit because, "as I understand it, the biggest award ever given in New York is for one million," he says.

Smith, who organized a parade where many participants wore K.K.K. hoods and carried anti-Bacon signs, said he came up with the idea after he noticed, "on some New York library or historical-society Web site," that someone with the same name as Bacon's mother mentioned that her grandfather had been a Klan leader in North Carolina. "He has never denounced his great-grandfather," Smith says.

The Klan characterizations were especially incendiary because of the Bahamas' history as a hub of the American slave trade. Bacon says the description of his great-grandfather as a Klansman was news to him, and adds that all his life he'd been taught instead about one ancestor, a Colonel Roger Moore, who stood down an angry mob to protect black prisoners from being lynched during the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot of 1898. Another ancestor, Bartholomew Moore, was a lawyer who argued in a landmark case that slaves had the legal right to protect themselves from a violent master. "What Nygard has accused me of is beyond the pale," Bacon says. "These things can't go unanswered. He's gone to a black nation that has pretty decent race relations and tried to stir up this racial thing by staging a Klan rally." Nygard says his involvement in the Klan accusations stemmed from "a grassroots movement" in which "locals came to me and asked for my help."

A key component of Bacon's defamation suit, which his attorney, Orin Snyder, vows will have its day before a jury, is a 1,000-hour cache of footage shot by Nygard's personal videographer, Stephen Feralio. Snyder secured the man's testimony and has sought access to the recordings, which he claims show Nygard's involvement in the harassment campaign—instructing employees on what he wants their YouTube spots to contain, for instance—as well as "Peter

Bahamas Battle

Nygard's meetings and interactions with Bahamian officials regarding construction at Nygard Cay, and Mr. Nygard's donation of money to Bahamian politicians," according to Feralio's attorney.

Nygard says that he has not seen the footage and that his lawyers dispute this account. Nevertheless, he has fought to have the footage ruled inadmissible. Earlier this year, he enlisted the help of Sitrick and Company, a Los Angeles P.R. and crisis-response firm that, in addition to many less controversial clients, has represented the Church of Scientology and Jeffrey Epstein, the New York financier imprisoned in 2008 for soliciting under-age prostitutes. Nygard's response to the defamation suit against him—on full display in his legal counterclaim—has been to double down and peddle more unverifiable and scandalous stories about Bacon. In July, the judge assigned to the case issued a ruling limiting Bacon's complaints to alleged smears that were published in mid-January 2014 or later—leaving him with 30 of the original 135 claims against Nygard. Then, in October, the judge dismissed Nygard's counterclaim against Bacon, writing that it constituted merely an attempt at retaliation, which is prohibited by the courts. Nygard says he plans to appeal.

It may be that the only thing Bacon and Nygard have in common, besides a Lyford Cay address, is their joint refusal to ever back down. They are like the North-Going Zax and the South-Going Zax in the Dr. Seuss tale, who will not budge, not ever, not one inch.

No Surrender

Nygard says he wants Bacon to leave Lyford Cay: "I think, at this point, it would be better if he did." He would consider nothing less a satisfactory end to their grudge match.

In August 2010, just after the police raid, Nygard wrote to Bacon in an e-mail, "Louis—Are you sure its worth it to escalate this Bahamas scrimmage? . . . we used to be friends—what happened? . . . If you have any problems, any concerns, any annoyances—just ask me direct—I'm sure we can work them out amicably."

To which Bacon replied, "You are the one with the various lawsuits against me . . . Peter, so I find this quizzical. . . . I am putting my holiday property on the market as it was intended for relaxation and enjoyment—it has become anything but thanks to you. To the extent you have used me as a straw man in your fights, you will need to find someone else now." In another e-mail Bacon offered to sell it to him at a discount, below the asking price of $35 million. "I will save something on the broker's commission . . . and you are the most interested party. Although I do not think it is right you should be the one buying it as you are the reason I am selling, so be it."

But Nygard—who has estimated that he spends a good 5 percent of his day battling Bacon—wasn't interested. He ignored Bacon's offer and soon hit him with another lawsuit, and the Internet campaign against him was launched. "He didn't want me to leave," Bacon says, meaning that, thanks to being freighted with a ton of neighborly litigation, Point House is essentially unsellable.

And the issue of the runoff on the driveway? That was settled two years ago, a rare moment of détente that could have opened the way to broader peace talks. "It just screamed 'resolution,'" one of their lawyers says. But no.

"He probably enjoys this," Bacon says. "It's blood sport to him." He acknowledges that he feels something similar, with no intention of raising the white flag. "It gives you a certain sense of purpose that, I guess, girds you to continue. Even as it's distasteful." Nygard believes Bacon "has a nasty habit of accusing other people of what he is guilty of himself."

Bacon says Nygard Cay is nothing more than "eye pollution."

Nygard insists that his place was "the Eighth Wonder of the World" until Bacon ruined it.

And so on. □

Slavery



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 101 doing. He said, "Go ahead. You can shoot me. I am ready to die." South America can be such an opera. It was September 12, 1973, the day after the coup d'état in Chile. Ten months later, Tito went into a forest and hanged himself. He was 28 when he died. Plassat was 24. Sorting through Tito's few effects, he found papers full of sad musings. One read, "It is better to die than to lose one's life." In São Paulo, the only mention allowed was a notice in a diocesan newspaper stating that Frei Tito had succumbed to an illness contracted in Brazil.

By now Plassat had a job: he was working as an economist for a consulting firm that provided audits and financial analysis to French labor unions—an experience that later would inform his fight against slavery. Tito had affected him deeply, and Brazil was on his mind. By the early 1980s, the Church there had turned against the military, and popular discontent was weakening the regime's grip on power. Late in 1982, Tito's family asked that his remains be repatriated, and the Church judged that the climate was right. Plassat was asked to handle the disinterment and accompany the coffin home. He scheduled a Mass for Tito at the cathedral in Lyon, and cast around for a Brazilian who could conduct it and speak about conditions in the country. He came across a French-speaking bishop from the Brazilian highlands named Tomás Balduíno, who was a combative defender of the landless peasantry. Balduíno was another Dominican and, it so happened, one of the men who had founded the Pastoral Land Commission. He was known as the Red Bishop. He was also a private pilot. He had a little airplane in which he flew to visit isolated communities in the Amazon. He had avoided arrest in part because the commission operated under the umbrella of the National Conference of Bishops, which the regime did not dare to take on.

Plassat and Balduíno accompanied the coffin from France to São Paulo. It was March 1983. The contrast with France was dramatic. A Mass and demonstration in memory of Tito at the São Paulo Cathedral was surrounded by security forces in armored vehicles. After the event, Plassat took Tito's remains to his hometown of Fortaleza for the burial, then met up with Balduíno at his highlands base, the beautiful colonial town of Goiás, in the state of the same name. Balduíno spent the following week showing Plassat the terrain in his airplane, introducing him to the work of the commission, and explaining some of the realities on the ground, where there was violence all around. From Goiás, Plassat took a bus to the fringe of the Amazon, in what has since become the state of Tocantins, where he joined a radical lawyer and Dominican friar named Henri Burin des Roziers, who was doing dangerous work for the commission, helping settlers hold out against the onslaught of commercial farming and government-sponsored landgrabs. The conflicts were intense. Burned settlements littered the landscape. People were fighting for their lives. When Plassat went home, the stakes in France seemed petty by comparison—unions demonstrating for a 3 percent raise because of 5 percent inflation. After a second trip to Brazil a few years later, he decided he wanted to help. It took a while to disengage from France, but in 1989 he flew to Brazil to join the knife fight in the jungle.

V. Replacing a Dead Man

It is an unlikely story: a French economist puts on a white robe, disappears into the Amazon, and becomes one of the most influential anti-slavery strategists of our time. Although he was aware of slavery in Brazil—several widely publicized instances had been discovered, including at a large farm owned by Volkswagen—Plassat was not thinking about slavery when he left France. The commission had its hands full just defending settlers. Plassat arrived soon after the first free elections in decades and was sent to

take up residence in the remote northern tip of Tocantins, an area formed by the confluence of two rivers and known as the Parrot's Beak for its shape. Three years earlier, a commission agent there, a strident young priest named Josimo Morais Tavares, had been gunned down on his office doorstep for advocating settlers' rights. Plassat had met Tavares during one of his earlier trips to Brazil and knew that he had expected to be killed. Plassat's job now was to pick up the fight where Tavares had left off, and if possible to stay alive.

In time slavery brought itself to his attention. The agricultural frontier lay a day's travel to the west, on a north-south line through Mato Grosso and Pará. Around 1992, commission agents there began to encounter increasing numbers of workers who had escaped from captivity on cattle ranches and charcoal-production sites. Traumatized, penniless, and fearful for their lives, they sought out the commission because of its reputation for helping the poor. When the runaways arrived, the agents fed and housed them briefly, and tried to get them home. At first it seemed that nothing else could be done, since going to the authorities was pointless.

By 1993 the commission had enough anecdotal information to realize that Brazil was facing a systemic problem. As an economist, Plassat did what he knew how to do. He started to gather, organize, quantify, and analyze the data. His project grew from that. Today he has 32 agents stationed around the country, primarily in remote towns in the Amazon. When workers come to one of them, claiming that they have been enslaved, the agents help them answer a lengthy questionnaire. It seeks all the pertinent information, including the presence of gunmen and the surprisingly difficult detail of location. Locations are difficult because of the ignorance of the workers, who don't carry G.P.S. devices, and may not know how to read or draw maps. Once the questionnaires are filled out, the agents e-mail them to Plassat and the Ministry of Labor—at the rate sometimes of several per week.

At the start, in the early 1990s, Plassat's intelligence network was rudimentary and the work was disheartening. Brazil refused to admit that slavery existed. Plassat was an unknown, and the cases he sent to the government got no response at all. He reacted by launching an all-out campaign: lobbying federal politicians, mobilizing workers, talking to journalists, and writing voluminous reports. He spent a lot of time on the phone, a lot of time on the computer. To embarrass the government he went abroad and denounced its inaction at the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and the Organization of American States.

For all its size and power, Brazil is acutely sensitive about its reputation. With Plassat pushing, the pressure was felt. On January 1, 1995, a new president, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, was sworn into office. Cardoso was an intellectual—a professor of sociology at São Paulo University—who happened to have written an academic treatise about debt bondage in the Amazon. In the first half-year of his administration, he declared during a weekly "Breakfast with the President" radio address that slave labor was a reality in Brazil, and he praised the work of the Pastoral Land Commission. It was a big victory for Plassat. Two months later came another victory: Cardoso announced the creation of an armed Ministry of Labor force whose sole purpose would be to rescue slaves and root out slavery. The force would be known as the Mobile Group. It would conduct raids far and wide, following up on the reports that the commission was providing. The raiding teams were to be led by specialized inspectors—lawyers all—who would be accompanied by federal police. Prosecutors could levy fines and bring criminal charges.

Over the years, Plassat has provided nearly half of the slavery complaints submitted to the government. In 1997 the commission formally launched a national anti-slavery campaign with Plassat at the helm. At around the same time, Plassat started a parallel effort to slow the traffic from the start by warning the people most at risk, many of whom are illiterate. He arranged for community and church presentations, and distributed pamphlets and posters featuring a cartoon figure carrying a hoe and pointing at his eye, accompanied by the slogan "Open Your Eyes: Don't Become a Slave!" The campaign began to take hold.

VI. "No One Will Care"

Plassat introduced me to a former slave whose experience illustrates the realities. He was a slender man named Elenilson Da Conceição, aged 29, who was born to a landless family in the impoverished northeastern state of Piauí. His father made adobe bricks; his mother was an itinerant seamstress who traveled by foot, peddling clothes door-to-door. Da Conceição quit school when he was 12 to help with the brickmaking. Three years later his father grew too ill to work, and Da Conceição continued alone. One afternoon, when he was 19, his uncle showed up with a stranger who was recruiting workers for a farm in the Amazon, about 900 miles away. The stranger was a labor agent of a type known as a *gato,* or "cat." He answered not to the landowner himself but to subcontractors who had been engaged to manage the operation. This was typical. As it turned out, he was a slave trader. Da Conceição might have wondered why the farm would have reached out so far to recruit workers, but he was a simple brickmaker and was attracted by the offer: the job would involve cleaning second-growth scrub from deforested pastures; transportation, housing, tools, and food would be provided; to regularize the contracts the workers' official labor cards would be signed immediately upon arrival at the farm; and the earnings, though based on acreage cleared, would be higher than the national minimum wage. Furthermore, if Da Conceição wanted an advance now to help support his family, he could name the amount, and the *gato* would pay it out immediately. Da Conceição settled on the equivalent of $150. Though he didn't know it, he had just set a price on the redemption of his life. It was about the going global rate for a slave.

Da Conceição departed with a group of 12 workers from his hometown. They traveled for two and a half days by chartered bus to a rough frontier town called Santana do Araguaia, in the southern part of Pará, and from there for another 60 miles to the middle of nowhere, where the bus stopped and two men who arrived in a pickup truck ordered the group to get into the back of a small cattle truck. The two men were the farm bosses. The cattle truck went 10 miles up the road, then turned off onto a small dirt track, which it followed for 30 or 40 miles until it could no longer proceed because of mud and water. Disembarking from the cattle truck, Da Conceição found himself deep in a dense and steaming forest, with no sign of an existing farm or anything like second-growth scrub. The bosses carried rifles and shotguns. They handed out machetes and ordered the men to clear the way forward, eventually to extend the track another three miles. The men were hungry and without food. A second pickup truck arrived with plastic tarps for use in building shelters. The next day food and chain saws arrived. The workers assumed the food would be distributed to them, but it was not. The bosses had them fashion planks from felled trees and build a wooden shack. They assumed that the shack was for them, but it was for a headquarters and farm store that would sell food and supplies to the workers. Having gone for several days without eating, they gave in and began buying food on credit.

Gradually it became evident that this was a big operation, with at least a hundred men at work in crews widely dispersed in the forest. The bosses remained distant from the workers, and armed at all times. They dehumanized the men by refusing to use their names. They called them by their home states. Da Conceição became "Piauí!," while others became "Maranhão!" or "Pernambuco!" Six days a week they worked from dawn to dusk. They lived on beans and rice. On Sundays they stewed beef in big buckets that had contained herbicide. They got their drinking water from a stagnant pond and stored it in similar buckets. The toilet was an oozing hole in the ground.

After a month of this they went to the man they had identified as the farm manager. They asked for their labor cards to be signed, as the law required. The manager refused. They asked to be paid. He said the situation had changed, and the wages would be one-fourth of those originally offered. When they asked him for the money nonetheless, he told them there would be none, because they had not yet worked enough to pay off their bus ride, let alone the food and supplies they had bought on credit. They retreated in shock. It was obvious that they had to quit, but to do so they would have to get a message through to their families to send money to settle their debts and

pay for the bus ride home. They went back to the manager and asked him to provide for a phone call. He refused, and said he would not send a message, either. They asked him to show exactly what they owed at the farm shop. It turned out that there were two types of accounts—individual for tools and sundries, and group for food—and that the prices being charged were two or three times higher than normal. Da Conceição despaired at ever being free. One man declared that they had to run away. The manager overheard him and said, "Piauí, do you imagine it's easy to run away from this farm? You are wrong. The next farm you enter will return you here. And then we may kill you. And no one will care."

Months went by. Then suddenly one day the manager arrived with two gunmen at his side and ordered the workers to get into a truck. He said he was sending them home. Someone had escaped and denounced the operation, and the Mobile Group was conducting a raid on the far side of the farm. The workers said, "What about our wages?" He promised to pay them at the bus station, and he did. Flanked by his enforcers, he handed out envelopes, warning the workers not to open them until they were on the bus. Fully cowed, they complied, and once under way found that the payouts—$7 here, $5 there—would not even cover the cost of food during the long ride home.

Soon after their return, Xavier Plassat and the commission stepped in to see what could be done, especially to guard against recidivism—the possibility that the same men would fall into slavery again. Plassat now speaks of this particular intervention as a success. After years of pressure, in 2011 the government allowed the former slaves to settle on expropriated land, where they could eke out an existence as subsistence farmers. Da Conceição remains extremely poor. I asked him how he could be sure, if someday he is offered another Amazon job, that it will be legitimate. He said that he will never again take the risk. He said, "At that time none of us would have called it slavery. We thought slavery had been abolished. We thought slavery was chains. Only now do we know that it was slavery. And that knowledge helps."

VII. The Dirty List

In 1998, the Pastoral Land Commission consolidated its Tocantins operations into a single office in the small city of Araguaína, a typically rough place that had become a transit point for workers heading off into slavery. The change was hard on Plassat after so many years in the countryside. He lived alone in a small house across the street from a noisy evangelical church, full of ecstatic worshippers in the evenings, and a raucous bar that started in where the church left off and partied until dawn. He wore earplugs at home. It was a frustrating time. He worked closely with the Mobile Group, but the raiding teams were often stymied. The fundamental problem was that the law was so vague that it was nearly unenforceable. "Conditions analogous to those of slavery"? What conditions exactly were those? In practice, the raiding inspectors could make findings of slavery only if they discovered evidence of physical restraint or debt bondage. That was hard to do, because the slaves feared the consequences of informing on their bosses. Frequently the Mobile Group could do nothing but write up a few labor-law violations and drive away, leaving workers to their fate. Even if they had enough evidence to free some slaves, the slaveholder simply waited for the Mobile Group inspectors to leave and then made arrangements to get some more.

In Brasília, the inspectors began to argue for a change. They wanted a new legal definition of slavery that would allow them to rescue far more people and pull them immediately off the farms. I spent several days with an experienced team leader, a bearded inspector from São Paulo named André Roston, 34, who was conducting raids in Tocantins. He said, "We see an employer treating people like things. Just like a tool. Or worse, just like something that does not need to be cared for. It's not that the employer is making some mistakes. He's not taking care—at all—of the workers." The solution they proposed drew directly from the Brazilian constitution, a document that declares, "No one shall be submitted to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment." What the inspectors wanted was a definition of slavery that included "degrading conditions."

In 2003, a new left-wing president, Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, assumed office. Lula came from the lowest level of Brazilian society. He had dropped out of school after fifth grade and worked as a shoeshine boy before finding employment in a factory and rising through the union ranks. It seemed likely that he would be an ally, and he was. In December 2003—where in another world the United States had started running around in Iraq—the Brazilian government amended the penal code to give the Mobile Group inspectors the definition they wanted. Henceforth, "conditions analogous to those of slavery" meant:

1. Captivity.
2. Debt bondage.
3. Exhausting working days.
4. Degrading conditions.

Any one of these elements now sufficed to define slavery, though in practice all four were usually present. The first three, however, generally required the cooperation of confused and vulnerable victims, while the last could be independently assessed by inspectors during a raid. That was the real point of "degrading conditions." It was more of a practical than an ethical matter, and it was immediately effective.

Hundreds of complaints were pouring in to Plassat about slaveholding operations. In the first year after the redefinition, the number of rescued slaves shot up to 5,000. As the numbers grew, the inspectors had to make ever more difficult choices about which reports to follow up on and which ones to ignore. For Plassat the criteria for triage seemed obvious: you raided the places with the largest numbers, or where conditions were the worst. If the government was slow to respond, Plassat stayed on its back. On one occasion he came upon evidence that slaves were being held on two farms in the southern part of Pará, and that three of them had been shot and killed, then returned to their families accompanied by the brazen claim that they had died in accidents. Having seen the corpses and the bullet wounds, Plassat demanded government action. Nothing happened. Four more slaves were killed. Plassat kept pushing, asking how many had to die. Finally the farms were raided, the remaining slaves were freed, and a criminal prosecutor stepped in with arrest warrants for 10 murder suspects—the two farmers and eight of their henchmen. The farmers fled. A complicated story ensued, involving the voluntary surrender of the more violent of the two farmers and his subsequent escape from prison. There was a bungled assassination attempt against the prosecutor. Word came that Plassat and two of his commission colleagues were marked for death. In the Amazon, no one takes such threats lightly. Plassat's two colleagues left the region. Plassat stayed in place.

Violence was all around. In 2004 three Mobile Group inspectors and a driver were ambushed and slain after making the mistake of conducting a raid without police protection. Afterward, the raiding teams bulked up. In 2005, it was the commission's turn when one of its associates, an American-born Brazilian nun named Dorothy Stang, was killed with six shots, four of them to the head, because she had challenged a certain rancher on the agricultural frontier in Pará. Stang's murder was widely publicized because of her origins in the United States, and the killers were convicted and jailed, but hundreds of equally heinous crimes went unnoticed. Working the numbers, Plassat surveyed more than a thousand regional killings and found that only 8 percent of them had resulted in action by the Brazilian state.

As for the risk to himself, he just got on with his job. The government estimated that 25,000 rural workers were entering the cycle of slavery annually. Rescuing 5,000 of them a year meant that Brazil was always falling behind. To me Plassat compared it to trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. Nonetheless, the rescue effort was a moral imperative, an emergency response that had to be sustained while efforts were made on other fronts.

It was on the demand side, where large corporations roam, that the most significant steps were taken. Plassat lobbied for the idea. In 2004, after the legal definition of slavery was expanded, the Ministry of Labor began to

publish a "Dirty List" of the people and companies known to have used slaves. At its height the list contained almost 600 names. Anyone on it stayed there for at least two years and found business drying up and loans difficult or impossible to obtain. More important, the list could infect others who got near: companies doing business with named slavers ran a serious risk of being tainted. They became guilty through association, with severe damage to their reputations: credit cut off, international business connections failing, stock prices falling. Out of fear of this, thus far more than 400 companies, representing almost 30 percent of Brazil's gross national product, have signed on to a National Pact for the Eradication of Slave Labor and vowed to remain free of infection.

VIII. The Enemy Fights Back

But all is not well. In December 2014 the Brazilian Supreme Court suspended publication of the Dirty List after finding technical errors in the associated wording. Efforts are under way to address the court's concerns, but for now the list remains on hold. Meanwhile, it is difficult to know what is happening in the shadows. Slavery in the Amazon is not about to end. The inspector André Roston mentioned to me that the Mobile Group seems to be spending more time looking in the wrong places, and achieving less in terms of results. Plassat was aware of the phenomenon but could not explain it. We were seated at a table in the small house where he now lives. The house adjoins a church in a quiet village called Aragominas, in rolling countryside about 30 miles west of the office in Araguaína. Scrolling through the data on a threadbare computer, Plassat said, "What we've observed over the past three years is a considerable reduction in the number of workers who come to the commission to ask for help." He rattled off the data, town by town, then jumped to an analysis. "That could mean at least three things. One is that they've found other institutions to help them, particularly the labor prosecutors. Or it may be that the work in these regions for which slaves were used doesn't exist so much anymore. Or it may be that slave labor has moved into even more remote areas, where the commission does not have a strong presence."

I said, "Or it may be that your efforts are succeeding."

He brushed the possibility away. "Yes, of course! That's the satisfying explanation!"

The satisfying explanation is the one now widely believed in New York, Washington, London, and Geneva. Plassat has become a famous man for a reason. Since 2005 he has received international awards, including one from the U.S. State Department. The prizes gather dust in his office, but they serve as a form of protection. He travels 30 miles to his office on a tiny Suzuki motorcycle, which he has already crashed. The commute makes him especially vulnerable to attack. But the killing of Plassat can no longer be done in obscurity. Meanwhile, the International Labour Organization is inching toward acceptance of "degrading conditions" as an indicator of modern slavery, and it points to Brazil as the foremost model for tackling the problem.

But Plassat is right not to claim success. Even if the annual number of people bound for slavery has been cut by half—or by two-thirds—Brazil is now at risk of losing ground. Four years ago an ascendant agri-business lobby in Brasília began to push back against the abolitionists. This lobby is allied to a Tea Party–style movement that has become a force in the Brazilian congress by tapping into disillusionment with the current president, Dilma Rousseff, as the economy has collapsed. The movement wants to roll back environmental and forestry regulations, deregulate the workplace, allow for open-ended labor subcontracting, and limit the liability of farmers for their subcontractors' violations. Some of this has already occurred. No one is proposing to legalize slavery, of course, but a broad effort is under way to eliminate "degrading conditions" and "exhausting working days" from the definition.

Roston said, "They claim we're arbitrary and go around declaring slavery on the basis of minor infractions, but it's not true." We were returning from a raid on a remote and squalid farm, where Roston had found violations, including child labor, but nothing that would qualify as slavery. He said, "For instance, 'exhausting working days.' It's not that you're tired, up late for a deadline. It's that you work so long and hard day after day that you cannot recover your energy and you die in a sugarcane field. We've had those cases. And 'degrading conditions.' We've had employers complain publicly, 'They found a bed that wasn't high enough off the ground, so they called my worker a slave.' But that's not true. We use combinations of specific indicators. Our law establishes some preconditions for lodging, for example. It's one thing to have a really dirty bathroom, another not to have a bathroom at all. The lack of a bathroom is a strong indicator of degradation, but it's not enough. So, you don't have a bathroom; you don't have adequate lodging; maybe you don't have lodging at all; you don't have potable water; you don't have safety equipment; you don't have a shelter for the workers in the field. They can't get out of the sun or rain. You don't have a first-aid kit. You don't have any way to get a worker to town if he is injured. You don't have anything! That's 'degrading conditions.'" He told me that in 2013 a congressional committee representing employers' interests ordered the Mobile Group to deliver every report of slavery it had ever produced so that the work could be scrutinized. Hostile though the committee was, it was unable to find a single case of capricious judgment.

The political attacks continue nonetheless, and it seems likely that in Brazil the definition of slavery will be narrowed. A journalist in São Paulo who follows the issue closely said, "It is more than likely. It is certain. The only question is when—this year or next?" I asked Roston what the effect would be on his work. He said, "We'll keep the program, but it will be much less important than it is now." In other words, the problem will be defined away. If reinstated, the Dirty List will shrink. And Brazil will suffer a setback.

It is possible that this will not happen. The public's awareness of slavery will not soon disappear. International commerce, banks, and the powerful corporations that have joined the National Pact may demand a Dirty List that continues to be credible. Plassat understands that the situation is very serious. I spoke with him about the possibility that much of his work in Brazil could be undone. If that happens, I said, his strategy may still endure as a legacy affecting the lives of millions around the world. He replied that "legacy" does not matter to him. Direct action in the present time does. He says he will never return to France: his opponents had better know that about him. Whatever happens, Plassat will not be deterred. I remember how once, in his speeding car, Plassat cut across a pasture, following the merest trace of a track through high grass. I asked, "Is this a footpath or a road?" He said, "It's a road, of course!" He laughed. He looked over at me. He said, "It's a question of faith." □

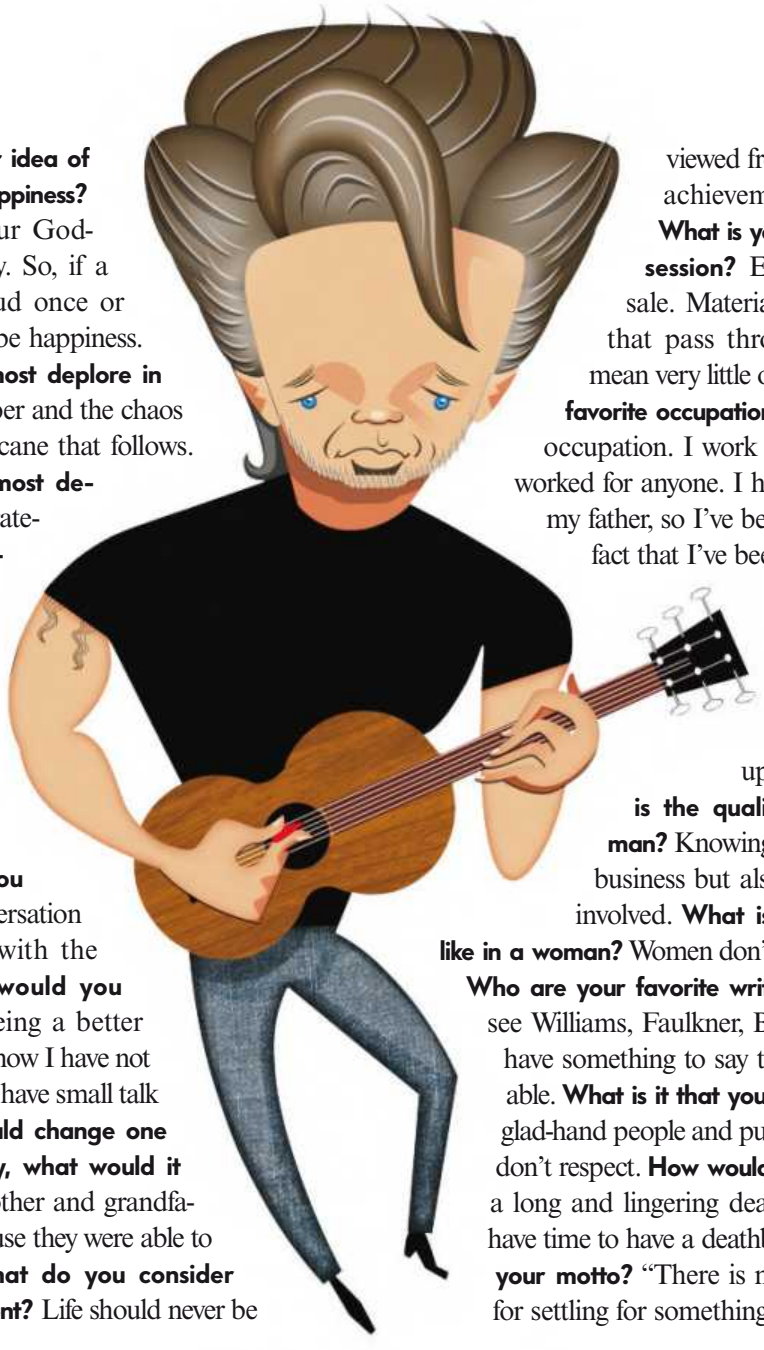
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John MELLENCAMP

The acclaimed rock musician, songwriter, actor, and painter discusses tea parties, Steinbeck, and why he wishes his grandparents were still alive



What is your idea of perfect happiness? It's not our God-given right to be happy. So, if a man can laugh out loud once or twice a day, that would be happiness. **What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?** My quick temper and the chaos that ensues in the hurricane that follows. **What is the trait you most deplore in others?** Ungratefulness. **On what occasion do you lie?** I make stuff up for a living, so I'm always in a constant state of creation. **What do you dislike most about your appearance?** My appearance. **Which words or phrases do you most overuse?** My conversation is way too peppered with the f-word. **Which talent would you most like to have?** Being a better "people person," but I know I have not been put on this earth to have small talk at tea parties. **If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?** I wish my grandmother and grandfather were still alive, because they were able to keep me grounded. **What do you consider your greatest achievement?** Life should never be viewed from the vantage point of achievements. It is total folly. **What is your most treasured possession?** Everything I have is for sale. Material items are just things that pass through your hands that mean very little or nothing. **What is your favorite occupation?** I'm doing my favorite occupation. I work for no one, never have worked for anyone. I haven't had a boss since my father, so I've been very fortunate in the fact that I've been able to live for myself and live the way I have chosen to live. **What is your most marked characteristic?** My pleasing, positive, upbeat personality. **What is the quality you most like in a man?** Knowing when to mind his own business but also when it's time to get involved. **What is the quality you most like in a woman?** Women don't seem to like me much. **Who are your favorite writers?** Steinbeck, Tennessee Williams, Faulkner, Bob Dylan. People who have something to say that is unique and relatable. **What is it that you most dislike?** Having to glad-hand people and put on a show for people I don't respect. **How would you like to die?** I need a long and lingering death to make sure that I have time to have a deathbed conversion. **What is your motto?** "There is no reward in this world for settling for something you don't want."

ILLUSTRATION BY RISKO


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